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### The politics of public construction in a globalized world

*Imagining urban space in Ecuador*

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## Chapter 1

### Globalizing Quito: The (new) Mariscal Sucre International Airport

#### Introduction

Approaching the airport as a space connected to the local, the national and the global context, and as a space shaped by emotional and social practices, the present chapter examines the ideas about globalization and the city expressed by authorities and technicians in relation to the construction of the new Mariscal Sucre International Airport (MSA). Taking the new airport and its difference from the old one as a case study, and following arguments about space by, among others, Marc Augé, Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, I combine analyses of political discourses, urban planning and urban aesthetics to explore: 1) the *lived* dimension of space reflected in the old Mariscal Sucre Airport; 2) the notions of globalization, space and the city reflected in the *conceived* space of the new Mariscal Sucre airport; and 3) how these notions are reflected in the realized new airport structure.

I will show how, discursively, the Alianza PAIS party, which is known for promoting local and nationalist approaches in order to undermine neoliberal perspectives on development, conceived of the new airport as part of an effort to emerge from a situation characterized as “underdeveloped” to one in which Quito emerges as a modern and global city-region. When talking about the new airport, the authorities emphasized its importance as a structure designed to configure a regional economic pole and a global city-region. The construction of the airport, then, was seen as a crucial step towards the inclusion of Quito, and therefore Ecuador, in a globalized context. In addition to increasing commerce, the expectation was also that the new airport would be capable of welcoming and reflecting diverse and plural identities. However, the idea of globalization reflected in the realized mega-structure is very different: the new airport appears as an impersonal, abstract space that disregards the historical and social realities of the city and country, and conceives of those moving through the space exclusively as users-consumers.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, I discuss understandings of the airport as a space of globalization in order to develop my theoretical framework. In the second section, I analyze the old Quito airport as a *lived* space, based mainly on an analysis of a monument called La Despedida (*The Goodbye*). The third section focuses on the new airport as *conceived* space and explores the discourses

surrounding its construction, its aesthetics and the functions assigned to the new buildings. I finish the chapter by reflecting on the differences between this conceived space and the realized new airport, as well as on the influence of the realized abstract space on the identities of its users.

### **Airports in global, national and local contexts**

To explore the difference between the old and the new MSA, I will use the categories of lived and conceived space proposed by Henri Lefebvre in *The production of space* (POS; 1974). In his Marxist analysis, Lefebvre defines space as a social product, a field where various types of space overlap; in this context and in broad terms, lived space is the space of everyday experience, which is experienced through symbols and images devised by its inhabitants and users. In contrast, conceived space is the conceptualized space or space as constructed by professionals and technocrats; it is space invested with an ideology and specific forms of power and knowledge (Lefebvre, 1974).<sup>7</sup>

Following the Lefebvrian perspective, Fernando Carrión analyzes the importance of infrastructures in the urban context, arguing that “infrastructures are historical because demands, technologies, modes of production, distribution and consumption are historical. In the same way, their relation with the city is historical” (2013, p. 14, author’s translation from Spanish). Infrastructures are the material basis of the city and a powerful instrument of urban politics; it is through the production and management of infrastructures that it is possible to define “where the city goes, which social sectors are beneficiaries, which kind of urban activities are being privileged and which kind of city is meant to be constructed” (F. Carrión, 2013, p. 12, author’s translation from Spanish). An important infrastructural component like an airport thus embodies and reflects social, political and cultural practices. Because of that, its analysis has gained importance in urban studies.

Airports are a vital component of the infrastructure of contemporary cities, mainly due to two reasons: on the one hand, they have gained importance in correlation with air travel growth, which is related to increased privatization and globalization; on the other hand, airports have developed in reciprocal relationships with the cities in which they are situated, both framing and being framed by urban form and structure (Headlam, 2013, p. 10). Traditionally, research about airports has taken a rational and positivist perspective,

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<sup>7</sup> In the introductory chapter of this study I explain Lefebvre’s categories of lived, conceived and perceived space in more detail. See pages 27-29.

focusing on estimates of air transport growth to provide the required infrastructure and to determine airport capacity (Lassen & Galland, 2014). Because of this, the socio-spatial, cultural and environmental consequences of air travel have received little attention. Nevertheless, in the last decade, studies have emerged on *aeromobility*, a term used to indicate the dominance of flying as “the normal international mode of traveling” (Adey et al., 2007, p. 774). These studies concentrate on different aspects of air travel, such as the airport, the plane and the flight route. The importance of aeromobility analysis lies in the way it approaches the airspace (and the structures and processes related to it) as a space embodied by emotional and social practices (Adey et al., 2007). In addition, it reveals the necessity of bridging the multiple scales that connect international air systems to particular local and urban transformation processes, and their impact on the spaces where airports are located (Jensen & Lassen, 2011, as cited in Lassen & Galland, 2014). This indicates a need to understand the airport space in terms of its complex position in the global, national and local context. My analysis of the new Quito international airport assumes that an airport is a produced space. Consequently, its construction is taken as a mirror of the dynamics of state urban planning and of how the state perceives the projects they manage in relation to the local, national and globalized context, as well as the desired future of the city.

Concerning airports and their position in the global context, Augé suggests that the space of the airport can be taken as a prime example of a *non-place*, which is characterized by what it lacks: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (1995, pp. 77-78). Augé argues that the traveler’s space may be the *archetype of non-place*. In such spaces,

neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make any sense; [they are] spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future. (Augé, 1995, p. 87)

For Augé, the proliferation of non-places is part of a “supermodernity” characterized by an excess of time, an abundance of events and an excess of space because we can, for example, travel from one part of the world to another with unprecedented speed. He

asserts that, in relation to this supermodernity, the word “non-place” designates two distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure) and the relations that individuals have with these spaces (Augé, 1995, p. 94).

The non-places of supermodernity are defined partly by the words and texts they offer to the consumer: advertisements, signage and specific instructions. The user follows these rules to maintain a sort of contract with the place (to buy a ticket, to wait in line, to check in, etc.) At the same time, according to Augé, a person entering the space of a non-place is relieved of their usual determinants: “he [sic] tastes for a while – like anyone who is possessed – the passive joys of identity-loss” (1995, p. 103). In other words, specific conditions apply to the interaction between individuals within non-places and this configuration of interactions creates an a-historical space without identity. At the same time, as explained by Lloyd, “precisely because it is betwixt and between places, the nonplace enables the reinscription of powerful meanings of home and travel, history and theory, work and play within its boundaries” (2003, p. 98).

Alongside the idea of non-place suggested by Augé, airports can also be defined as cosmopolitan spaces that connect a country to a globalized world (Adey et al. 2007). This cosmopolitanism is reinforced by companies that remind passengers and visitors that an airport is a global-social space by invoking visions of global citizenship through route maps and airline advertisements (Adey et al. 2007). Within this perspective, the airport works as a node binding the national and global contexts together, constituting an international place of connection and encounter with different realities-worlds-cultures and economies.

The third view of airports, emphasizing their localness, suggests a clear difference with the non-place and the cosmopolitan perspectives: an airport cannot be considered as a *placeless* place given that the “world of transit doesn’t operate at the same velocity, or in the same mode, in every place” (Fuller, 2003, p. 3, as cited in Adey et al., 2007, p. 778). An airport is a space with its own rhythms and characteristics depending on the city in which it is situated. Following this local perspective, in terms of politics and economy, an airport can reflect the positioning of the authorities driving its construction in relation to the discourses of globalization and those of trade and human flows. Simmons and Caruana (2001) demonstrate that airports are inscribed with national and local identities, and that they “engender considerable civic pride and are hence objects of municipal peacockery” (cited in Adey et al., 2007, p. 778). In the East Midlands in Great Britain, for example, “citizens demanded to fly from their own airport, as cultural and discursive

formations of 'air- mindedness' encouraged them to believe that if their city did not have an airport, it was surely disconnected from the modern world" (Adey, 2006a, cited in Adey et al., 2007, p. 778). According to Cosgrove (1999), contemporary airports are replete with representations of local identities and cultures to remind visitors where they are and to emphasize their "localness" (cited in Adey et al., 2007, p. 778).

The triple status of airports (global-national-local) suggests that their space could be considered as *glocal*. This concept was developed in the 1990s by Roland Robertson (2003) and, in economic terms, refers to the capacity of simultaneously thinking globally and acting locally. In cultural terms, it refers to the combination and dialectical connection between local and global elements: the local has been globalized and the global has been localized. In the case of an airport, it is part of a dynamic global network and situated in its own particular context.

Having described the airport as a produced space with global, national and local dimensions, and as therefore occupying a glocal position within the dynamic of the city, in the next section I will analyze the old Mariscal Sucre Airport as a lived space.

### **The old Quito airport as a *lived space***

The history of the old Mariscal Sucre Airport, located in the north of Quito, dates back to 1935, when it started to operate as an airfield with basic infrastructure. In 1960, it became an airport that, during its 53 years of operations, mirrored and, at the same time, reconfigured the social and economic reality of Quito and Ecuador. My exploration of the old airport as a lived space starts with its name, which honors Marshal Antonio José de Sucre, a Venezuelan citizen who fought for the independence of Latin America from the Spanish Empire (Figure 0.1) and is usually portrayed as noble, severe and strict, but at the same time having a "smooth and almost angelical character" (Salcedo, 1980 / 2009, p. XII, author's translation from Spanish). Apart from being known for accompanying Simón Bolívar in his numerous battles around Latin America, Mariscal Sucre was, among others, founding president of the Republic of Bolivia, President of the Congress of Gran Colombia and a renowned diplomat. On 24 May 1822, he confronted the Spanish army during the Pichincha battle, which is known as the main battle of Quito's independence struggle, leading to the foundation of the Republic of Ecuador.



**Figure 0.1** Marshal Antonio José de Sucre. Artist unknown. Photo retrieved from Pinterest, October 2017.

Despite not being born on Ecuadorian soil, Sucre is considered a national hero and his pro-independence spirit is continuously brought to the present in the Ecuadorian imaginary. In almost every city in Ecuador, he (together with Bolívar) is represented in the form of monuments and names of plazas and streets. Between 1884 and 2000, the national currency was named Sucre, so that every Ecuadorian citizen felt the marshal's presence in their wallets. It is therefore not a surprise that the first airport in Quito received Sucre's name. This decision carried with it the intention to reinforce a shared national memory, so that every time Ecuadorian citizens took a plane, they would remember the events that resulted in the formation of their sovereign country.



**Figure 0.2** Old Quito airport. Photo by JPC van Heijst (October 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.airplane-pictures.net/photo/227117/airport-overview-general/>.

**Figure 0.3** Old Airport Mariscal Sucre (2010). Photo by Sylvain2803. Retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quito\\_Mariscal\\_Sucre\\_Airport.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quito_Mariscal_Sucre_Airport.JPG).

From the first years of its operation, the old airport was a focal point in the local space, situated in the north of the city amid houses and buildings (see Figure 0.2 & Figure 0.3). It consisted of a gray, square building that followed the modernist design of other airports of the 1960s. Inside, there was a famous mural (which is still there) painted by Galo Galecio and representing Elía Liut, an Italian aviator who, in 1920, was the first to cross the Ecuadorian Andean mountains in a plane called *Telégrafo I*, owned by the *El Telégrafo* newspaper (Liut et al., 2015; see Figure 0.4). What transformed the old airport space into a lived space in Lefebvre’s sense were its location and the numerous events that took place in it during its 53 years of operation.



**Figure 0.4** Mural portraying Elia Liut in the *Telégrafo 1*. Photo by Luz Elena Coloma. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/ZULNELEA/status/441659598790217728>.

In terms of its location, the old airport shared the same area with buildings, family houses and main roads, so that seeing an airplane almost at ground level was a frequent scene, part of the local dynamic of the city. This location contributed to the perception of the airport as a space close to everyday life, as one of the residents living in the area, Amparo Cisneros, notes: “[the airplanes] were better than an alarm clock, I woke up with the one that took off at six AM” (“Viejo aeropuerto”, 2013, par. 10, author’s translation from Spanish). This proximity of the airfield to other city buildings also caused some tragic events; airplane accidents occurred on the runway and in the airport’s vicinity, occasioning human and material losses. At the same time, the central location of the



airport allowed the citizens to have close encounters with celebrities visiting the country from abroad. For example, in 1985, when Pope John Paul II visited Ecuador, thousands of people gathered in front of the airport buildings to welcome him. This also happened when international singers or actors arrived in the city; their arrival was considered an event worth attending, transforming the space of the airport into a platform for emotional encounters and exceeding the original function of the airport as a space for travelers.

The proximity of the airport to the city and the social dynamics this attached to its space, transformed it from a structure into a lived place that was more “felt than thought, alive, fluid and dynamic” (Lefebvre, 1974) or, in other words, a place distant from the a-relational and a-historical non-place described by Augé. The everyday experiences attached to the airport, not only by travelers but also by other people in whose lives it played a role, filled it with a strong local meaning.

The airport’s reality as a lived space is reaffirmed when analyzing the relation of its space to the economic crisis of the end of the 1990s. In this context, the space of the old Mariscal Sucre airport was invested with a new meaning and became a symbol of an economic and political crash. As explained in the introduction of this study, in 1999, under the government of President Jamil Mahuad, a severe economic crisis hit Ecuador. As a result of what became known among the media, government and citizens as *el atraco bancario* [the bank robbery], inflation rose to 56% in 1998, contrasting with the 10.2% average estimated for the other Latin American countries (CEPAL, 1998, quoted in Salgado, 1999).<sup>8</sup> Strikes took place all over the country and the government was heavily criticized. Poverty levels, inequality and unemployment, already high before the crisis, all increased (Salgado, 1999). This prompted thousands of people to leave the country in the period between 1999 and 2005. In 2011, out of a population of 15 million, it was estimated that between two and three million Ecuadorians were living and working abroad, mainly in Europe and the US (Mancheno, 2010). Since then, migration processes have played an important role in Ecuadorian society: the peak of the migrants' economic remittances came in 2007, and even though the amount has decreased, remittances were still the country’s main source of external income in 2011 (OIM, 2012).

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<sup>8</sup> For more on this economic crisis, see page 12 of the Introduction to this study.



**Figure 0.5** People watching a KLM airplane taking off (2003). Photo by Fernando Rivera. Courtesy of Fernando Rivera-2014.

**Figure 0.6** Bienvenida Abuela [Welcome grandma] – old Mariscal Sucre airport. Photo retrieved from <http://www.hoy.com.ec>. December 2013.

As a result of the crisis, mostly during the final years of the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, the space of the old airport was transformed from a space of connection and traveling to a symbolic place of migration, featuring emotional welcomes and goodbyes that represented not only travel to another country, but also the prospect of new economic and social horizons. To travel meant having the courage to leave everything behind and start a new life:

To the airport came people from provinces, most of them indigenous. Entire families came in buses to say goodbye to a beloved one. They brought potatoes, chickens, guinea pigs and bananas. Some of them set a table and had lunch while waiting for the departure time [...] I remembered wives that did not know where their husbands were going. A lady was crying at the international departure gate. She told me that her husband went to Europe for working, but she didn't know to which country... (Mena, 2012, para. 13, 18, author's translation from Spanish)

The airport became a *lived place* of feelings, pain and hope as grandparents, cousins, friends, aunts, grandchildren, brothers and sisters came to stay with the traveler until the very last moment.

If the name Mariscal Sucre was a means to remember a heroic past in which Ecuador achieved its independence, with the airport's prominent role in the migration

wave it also became a space of dreaming about the future. For example, the waiting room, originally meant to be a place to spend a short time before boarding, became a space to reflect and raise questions about the decision to go abroad. For most of the passengers, who were economic migrants at the same time, the departure also involved a change of status: for example, to buy a ticket implied spending the savings of the whole family and, in other cases, would require dealing with illegal lenders. Furthermore, most of the migrants did not have a residence permit for their destination, so to stay in the United States or Europe implied becoming “illegal” and hiding from authorities. Consequently, for these people, the airport was far from a non-place; rather, the space was charged with emotional meaning and memories, and the moment of departure would remain embedded in every future experience.

During this period of migration, people who went to the airport to say goodbye to their relatives used to stand behind the perimeter fence looking at their airplane taking off (Figures 1.5 and 1.6). Crying and blessing their sons, mothers, cousins and friends, people stayed there for hours. As a result, the fence became a place of interaction where people cried, laughed, ate and even slept because many flights took off early in the morning (F. Rivera, personal communication, December 26, 2013).



**Figure 0.7** Muro de los lamentos [Wailing Wall] (2012). Screenshot from YouTube video (ExpresarteEC, 2012).

The combination of feelings, sensations and expectations that accompanied the experience of traveling abroad imposed a social practice and specific mental constructs onto the space of the airport. The dynamic of traveling embedded in the migration process and the relation between the families and the airport was so strong that, in 2003, they

were honored with a sculpture named the *Muro de los lamentos* or Wailing Wall (Figure 0.7). This wall was situated in front of the airstrip and represented families saying farewell. On one side of the sculpture there was an inscription, a verse of a sad song that says: “*Far away from you, it seems like my eyes have no light, and my body has no life*” (author’s translation from Spanish).

The metal sculpture was created by the Ecuadorian architects Fernando Rivera and Francisco Ramírez. At 2.5 meters high and 10 meters wide, it represents thirteen migrant silhouettes. Each silhouette is a character: there is the “beloved” wearing a jacket, a mother with her daughter, two women representing sisters, a father and a group of friends. The original name of the work was *La Despedida* (*The Goodbye*), but as time passed people started to call it “The Wailing Wall”, comparing it to the well-known Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, where the Jewish community gathers to pray and mourn. The silhouettes were constructed based on eighty photos taken by Rivera, who used to live next to the airport and watched the people at the fence every day. The idea of a monument came to him on the basis of these observations: “in the world there exist monuments for everything, and we as Ecuadorians did not have something for those who were sacrificing themselves abroad and sending money to the country” (F. Rivera, personal communication, December 26, 2013, author’s translation from Spanish).

Rivera’s testimony can be linked to the notion of the counter-monument proposed by James E. Young (1992).<sup>9</sup> Analyzing non-conventional forms and questioning the fixed memories reflected in traditional monuments, Young proposes counter-monuments as “memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of their being” (1992, p. 271). For example, analyzing contemporary holocaust monuments designed by artists in Germany, Young observes how the artists intend to go “against the traditionally didactic function of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate – and finally, against the authoritarian propensity in all art that reduces viewers to passive spectators” (1992, p. 274). With these intentions in mind, the artists located the monuments in places close to urban life and constructed them in such a way that people could interact and feel familiar with them (as a result of being allowed to write on the structures, for example). In Lefebvre’s terms, such counter-monuments can be seen as lived spaces. As Young notes, their aim:

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<sup>9</sup> I will come back to this notion in Chapter 4, where I analyze the construction of local monuments.

is not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by its passersby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation and desecration; not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet. (1992, p. 277)

Similarly, the Wailing Wall was also meant to provoke, to make evident the emotional events taking place in the space of the airport. The sculpture was perceived as more than a static structure; it was designed to convey an ongoing process of migration and the emotions attached to it. According to Rivera, in 2004, once the sculpture had been installed, it received positive comments. Over time, it became a meeting point and people started to draw graffiti and goodbye messages on it. In other words, the Wailing Wall materialized the lived emotions and experienced temporality of migration in the space of the airport, undermining once more time the idea of the airport as a non-place. In 2007 President Rafael Correa thanked Rivera and noted that the sculpture was a deserved tribute to the migrants and reflected an important reality of the country (F. Rivera, personal communication, December 26, 2013).

However, the sculpture was not only perceived positively. The lived dimension of the airport it reflected was perceived by some, from the perspective of the airport as conceived space, as out of place. Quiport, the concession corporation formed by US and Canadian enterprises in charge of airport management, complained that it never gave permission for the sculpture's assembly. For them, the sculpture also constituted a provocation: they suggested that the people coming to say goodbye to their relatives, in a burst of enthusiasm, might climb the structure in order to jump the fence and invade the airstrip (F. Rivera, personal communication, December 26, 2013).

The erection of the sculpture revealed the different approaches of those in charge of public space: Quiport, which is a private corporation, and the municipality of Quito. Despite the resistance of Quiport, the municipality, through the Direction of Parks and Gardens, mounted the work without prior notice and it stayed there until the closing of the old airport. The former Mayor of the city, Paco Moncayo, realized that the place was significant for the families and built a viewpoint next to the fence so the people could use it to get a better view of the planes departing. Nevertheless, once the viewpoint had been constructed, nobody wanted to use it, maybe because was not in the same place as they were used to, demonstrating the difficulty of institutionalizing elements of a lived place.

Complaints about the sculpture also emerged from upper-class people living close to the airport; according to them, the sculpture was a “tribute to the poor people” and “this is not our Ecuador” (F. Rivera, personal communication, December 26, 2013, author’s translation from Spanish). Despite these criticisms, the sculpture stayed, though Quiport did install 24-hour security with cameras and guards to prevent people crossing the fence and reaching the airstrip.



**Figure 0.8** Citizens invading the airstrip to block Lucio Gutiérrez’s escape (2005). Photo by EFE agency. Retrieved from <https://www.eluniverso.com/2005/04/21/0001/8/8FBB254438A346B2B04C96D1DEEA72BA.html>.

In 2005, the airport was also the site of a historical political event related to the ousting of President Lucio Gutiérrez. In 2002, Gutiérrez had won the presidential elections using a nationalist discourse, agitating against the “oligarchy” and “corrupted politicians”, and demonstrating his intolerance of anti-nationalist interests (De la Torre, 2008, author’s translation from Spanish). Despite the positive expectations of the citizens regarding the new government, after three years Gutiérrez had antagonized his supporters by ending the alliance with the indigenous and leftist movement Pachakutik, intensifying the relationship with the US and establishing a new coalition with the right-wing conservative Partido Social Cristiano (Social Christian Party). Prompted by criticism of the unfulfilled promises, nepotism and corruption of the government, the political situation turned critical in 2005 and protests and marches against Gutiérrez took place in Quito. Between February and April 2005 the protests increased in number and intensity. On the 19th and 20th of that month, protests demanding the president’s resignation turned violent and Gutiérrez was dismissed from his post by the national congress. At this point, he tried to escape by going to the Mariscal Sucre Airport and flying off in an army plane, but hundreds of citizens broke through the airport fence and blocked his departure (Figure

0.8). Gutiérrez could not leave the country and asked for asylum at the Brazilian embassy (“Gutiérrez intentó”, 2005). Although the episode of the citizens blocking Gutiérrez’s escape was not memorialized at the airport in a material way, it is remembered as an important victory of the people.

Together, the migration process and the political events that unfolded in the space of the old airport gave it a distinctly local meaning and emotional importance, which take it beyond the idea of the non-place. Significantly, when the new airport was opened, none of these episodes were commemorated. After its closure, the old airport was turned into the Bicentennial Park. In 2004, the municipality decided to use the space as a public park and a convention center. Later, under the administration of Mayor Augusto Barrera, the park was named Parque Bicentenario, honoring, as in the case of the old airport, Ecuador’s independence. According to Andrea Carrión, “[the municipal administration] promoted a master plan to foresee urban growth, foster redevelopment, address real estate interests, and include land value capture mechanisms. The new plan promoted densification, ecofriendly buildings, landscape design, a metro station, and new avenues (Vela, 2011)” (2016, p. 258-259). The Wailing Wall sculpture was moved to the 24 May Boulevard, located in the old center of the city. With this relocation, the sculpture and all the memories attached to it became less visible. Once the new constructions of the park are completed, the plan is to move the sculpture back to its original place.

According to Rivera, it is important that the sculpture returns to the site of the old airport because it was constructed for a particular place and responded to a particular social process. In the manner of a counter-monument, it serves as a reminder of and testimony to a financial crisis that cannot be allowed to happen again and that was caused by identifiable decision-makers (F. Rivera, personal communication, December 26, 2013). The act of removing the sculpture to a different location makes it less effective as a counter-monument and undermines its significance and importance as a lived space in the urban context.

My analysis of the old Mariscal Sucre Airport as a lived space rather than a non-place allows me to argue that, because of the memories of social, economic and political events, as well as the family stories, practices and events linked to the airport, it can be considered as a space that was appropriated by its users and, more broadly, the citizens of Quito, as a site to reconfigure or reaffirm their identities. In the case of the migration process, which continues to have an enormous impact on the country’s economy, those who left had decided to start all over again, turning the main entrance to the airport into

a space marking the start of a journey from which they might never return. Thus, the “passive joys of identity-loss” Augé associates with non-places do not apply to the space of the old Quito airport. With its own rhythms and its specific configuration as part of everyday urban life, it invites us to rethink the space of the airport as not necessarily a non-place, but as potentially making possible new and creative experiences, as well as new identities. The importance of the old airport in the Quito citizens' imagination as a lived space was affirmed when, during the last day of operations, hundreds of peoples went to say goodbye to the airport with fireworks and water arcs.

### **The new Mariscal Sucre Airport as *conceived* space**

In this section I describe how the new Mariscal Sucre airport was conceived by the authorities and technicians in charge of its construction. I argue that none of the previous lived experience of the old airport or local characteristics of the site for the new airport were considered. On the contrary, the new airport was visualized as part of an effort to emerge from a situation characterized as “underdeveloped” to a new condition where Quito is conceived as a modern and global city-region. I base this argument on an analysis of the discourse of the authorities in charge and of the new airport structure. As was explained earlier, according to Lefebvre, *conceived space* refers to conceptualized space, space as constructed by professionals and technocrats.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the construction of the airport, the ideology and ideas of order, space and power held by the authorities can be analyzed when observing the way in which they transformed and visualized the urban environment of Quito.

In the last years, at least in formal terms (in the Constitution, for example), the Ecuadorian government has given signs of seeking, in Edward Soja's (2010a) terms, *spatial justice*, meaning that it has shown an intention to reach an equitable distribution of resources through the deconcentration of power, progressive forms of spatial planning and measures to benefit historically marginalized sections of the population. This striving for spatial justice, however, is not materialized in the new Mariscal Sucre International Airport, which was inaugurated in February 2013 after a long process of negotiations that started in the 1970s. Construction started in 2006 and, since then, many controversies and legal issues have emerged, including corruption lawsuits, complaints about a lack of

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<sup>10</sup> In the introductory chapter of this study I explain Lefebvre's categories of lived, conceived and perceived space in more detail. See pages 27-29.



transparency in pricing and critiques of substandard construction conditions. Nevertheless, the airport was inaugurated as a milestone for the city. In her article “Megaprojects and the Restructuring of Urban Governance, the Case of the New Quito International Airport” (2016), Andrea Carrión analyzes the disputes between political actors that arose during the construction process of the airport. She mentions that, while studies for the planning and designing of the airport took place during the 1980s and 1990s, it was during the administration of Mayor Paco Moncayo (2000-2008) that the new airport was promoted as part of a quest for the modernization and internationalization of the city and the country.

In the early 2000s, CORPAQ (a public corporation created to conduct the preliminary studies and establish the public bases for an international bidding process) and the Canadian Commercial Corporation (chosen after international bidding) prepared the financial and technical proposals for its construction (A. Carrión, 2016). The Quiport Corporation was established in 2002 to manage the concession contract. Conformed by a consortium of international companies – CCR (Companhia de Concessões Rodoviárias) from Brazil, Odinsa from Colombia and the Houston Airport System Development Corporation (HAS DC) from the United States (Aeropuerto Quito, 2017) – the Quiport Corporation was put in charge of the management of the old airport as well as the development, design, finance, construction, operation management and maintenance of the new one (Aeropuerto Quito, 2017). During the administration of Mayor Augusto Barrera (2009-2014), a member of Alianza PAIS, the international bidding and concession were questioned and negotiations started to change the conditions of economic participation in the project’s revenues.

After these negotiations, which were seen as positive in achieving an agreement with private actors, “the political discourse changed: from being the worst of neoliberal deals the project had become a model to follow in reclaiming the role of the state” (A. Carrión, 2016, p. 258). Analyzing some of the conflicts linked to the land of the former airport, the new terminal building and the highways connecting the city with the airport, Andrea Carrión concludes that the construction of the airport “went beyond the materiality of infrastructure, financial flows, or international agreements” (2016, p. 259). During the process of construction, local authorities with different political affiliations and power used an urban entrepreneurship approach, meaning that, through the construction of the airport the authorities tried to “stimulate economic growth, improve international competitiveness, achieve profitability, and garner higher revenues for the

public sector” (A. Carrión, 2016, p. 262). Complementing this analysis, I focus on how the new airport was conceived by the authorities in the last stage of construction, in terms of the discourses used in relation to the airport, as well as on the materialization of these discourses in the new MSA’s buildings.

At a national level, Alianza País has represented the airport as “the greatest infrastructure in the city” and as part of a project of “mega infrastructures”. According to President Correa, the airport is one of the symbols of “the new country”, which implies an Ecuador of “progress”, “well-being”, and “hope”. The president has also emphasized the idea of Ecuador as a country that “has overcome *mental under-development*” (Correa in MrEnterate, 2013, author’s translation from Spanish). The project is conceived as an ambitious symbol of progress in a distant area of Quito, designed to spread positive economic effects to adjacent zones. Moreover, it is considered as part of a *national mobility system*, which has the objective of achieving a harmoniously distributed development of the whole country and “the integration of the country through transoceanic and multimodal axes” (Correa in MrEnterate, 2013, author’s translation from Spanish). The new Quito airport is envisioned as a central point of communication with countries on the other side of the ocean and as a means to transport people and, more importantly, goods. In these terms, the airport is seen as a tool for economic growth. Its construction and that of other large infrastructure projects is expected to improve the country’s competitiveness by generating “regional poles”, meaning centers of economic activity and growth (Correa in MrEnterate, 2013).

These intentions behind the new airport construction reflect what Soja calls *regional urbanization*: a process through which the duality of urban/suburban is being destroyed: “traditional suburbia is still there, but is progressively disappearing, and so the urban / suburban boundary is disappearing in many places” (2010b, para. 2). Accordingly, the Mayor of Quito, Augusto Barrera, presents the new airport as a crucial step towards establishing a global city region. This concept, broadening Saskia Sassen’s notion of the global city, links globalization and urbanization processes and is characterized by expansive urbanized areas (Soja, 2005). It is a formation in-between a state and a city, product of the increasingly global flows of labor and capital. It refers also to the external relations of cities: due to the impact of information and communication technologies, they become “hierarchically structured based not simply on population size but on the degree of city-centered control over transnational flows of capital, labor, information, and trade”

(Soja, 2005, p. 1). Soja continues by explaining that “the global city region is still emphatically the expression of urban based industrial capitalism” (2005, p. 1).

Why does the Ecuadorian government want to convert Quito into a city region? With regard to this process of transformation, Augusto Barrera – the city’s mayor between 2009 – argues that “it is in essence a political exercise instead of a technocratic one” (2012, p. 39, author’s translation from Spanish). From Barrera’s perspective, Quito must become an autonomous city region for various reasons, including the need to provide significant urban growth, to solve transport problems, to ameliorate difficulties in differentiating between urban and rural areas, and to connect dispersed populations through commercial and cultural networks. He has also argued that “to advance towards the construction of Quito as a city region, the first step is to reinforce the sense of identity” (Barrera, 2012, p. 46, author’s translation from Spanish). In this respect, he highlights the importance of configuring “new elements of self-esteem and local identity” in Quito that, against neoliberalism, assume diversity and plurality (Barrera, 2012, p. 46, author’s translation from Spanish). Barrera indicates the need to construct a modern and “contextual identity”, by which he means an identity that embraces the multiple faces of a city with both traditional and postmodern characteristics: “The construction of such a kind of identity implies that the city must be tolerant, respectful and progressive. A city that includes without denying specific identities” (Barrera, 2012, p. 46, author’s translation from Spanish). In his view, this contextual identity will facilitate a move towards an inclusive and “progressive” society.

Handel Guayasamín, the current national president of the Ecuadorian Colleague of Architects, explains how the authorities and technicians in charge of urban transformations have conceived the development of Quito. He argues that it has moved from being the “City of the Sun” (as it was called during the Inca Empire) to being the “City of the Mall”. For him, this transformation is the “worst attack” that Quito has experienced in terms of planning and urban design. Within the idea of the “City of the Mall”, he explains, international capital, which is monopolistic and oligopolistic, has been favored to the detriment of an economic system based on small economy networks (seamstresses, small shoe shops and convenience stores, etc.), bonds of friendship, cooperation and solidarity. In the city planning process, according to Guayasamín, there is no interest in the social and cultural aspects of the urban environment. Certainly, when observing the recent development of the city, it is easy to see that it follows a model that privileges cars instead of human beings and primarily constructing administrative centers

and businesses and commercial areas following hegemonic and standard parameters, leading to a cultural alienation. In sum, Quito's urban planning does not reflect local concerns but an architecture of global homogenization. According to Guayasamín:

What little remains has been used as folklore rather than an identity [...]. It is necessary to recognize ourselves in what we are now. We are not indigenous peoples anymore, only a few strongholds remain and some inhabitants that have some respect for these topics. [...]. Hence the need to design a new kind of city, where diversity, interculturality and multifunctionality are valued, in other words, the real city...(H. Guayasamín, personal communication, January 15, 2014, author's translation from Spanish)

This sounds similar to the diverse, plural city proposed by Mayor Barrera, but the two visions are not the same: in the process towards a city-region according to the Mayor's discourse, globalization and diversity are presented as non-contradictory terms, erasing the friction Guayasamin sees between them.

As Andrea Carrión (2016) points out, the new airport as conceived space contained different, potentially conflicting elements; besides appearing as the epitome of modernity, for example, references to Quito's cultural diversity and local history were to be included:

The terminal was portrayed not only as an artifact of modernity (Mattos, 2006) but as reflecting imaginaries and narratives of historical and local identity. The facilities were to include an on-site museum with archaeological pieces found during the construction stage as well as a mural that evokes the French Geodesic Mission. (2016, p. 259)

Thus, contrary to the municipality's discourse, which is focused on the way the airport signifies the city's global future, the planners in charge of its construction expected it to reflect the city's plural past as well. Following these intentions, the new airport kept the name "Mariscal Sucre", against the wishes of the municipality:

The municipality proposed several alternatives, among which "Mitad del Mundo" [center of the world] had wide popular support after an Internet

contest. President Correa publicly asked the mayor [Barrera] to retain the name of Antonio José de Sucre, a marshal and independence leader. The municipal council delayed its decision and finally tipped in favor of “Mariscal Sucre.” (A. Carrión, 2016, p. 259)

The disputes around the new airport’s name reflect the different perspectives on the type of city and/or nation the authorities wanted the new airport structures to help build. The airport as conceived space existed in at least two forms that were not reconcilable. The name “Mitad del Mundo” refers to Ecuador’s location on the equator and corresponds to the conception of Quito as a future global city-region proposed by Mayor Barrera. On the other hand, the name “Mariscal Sucre” alludes to the past and to the idea of keeping national values related to Ecuador's independence alive. In the following section, I describe which of these conflicting conceptions of the new airport was concretized in the new constructions.

### **The new Mariscal Sucre Airport as commodified non-place**

According to Lefebvre, capitalist and neocapitalist processes result in “abstract space”. This type of space

includes the “world of commodities”, its “logic” and its worldwide strategies, as the power of money and that of the political state. This space is founded on the vast network of banks, business centers and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices. Within this space the town - once the forcing-house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and center of historical space - has disintegrated. (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 53)

To understand how the new Mariscal Sucre airport was constructed as a neoliberally conceived abstract space, in this section I analyze its material structures in terms of what imaginations of the city and country, and of the identities of their inhabitants, they exclude and include, in line with Lefebvre’s idea that any space “asserts, negates and denies” (1974, p. 99).

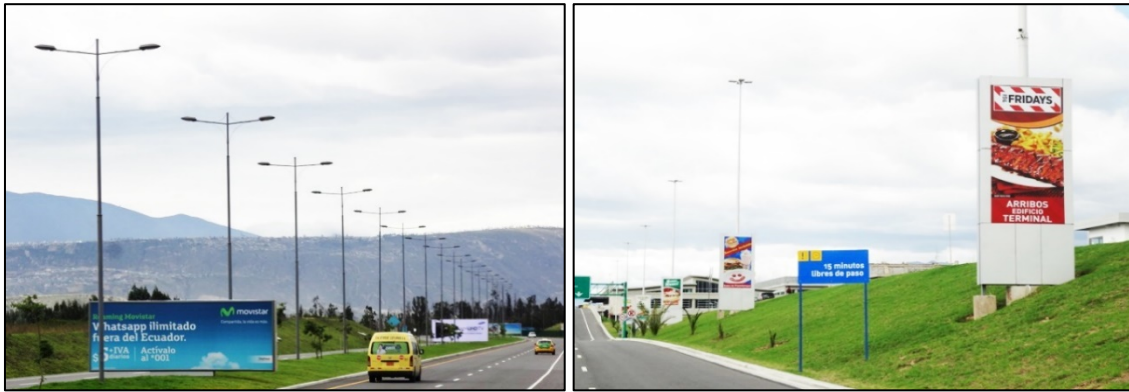
In 2006, during the construction work, archaeological remains of a pre-Inca culture from the fifth and twelfth centuries AD were discovered on the terrain of the new airport (“Vestigios”, 2006). However, the executives in charge of the airport construction

rejected the idea of stopping the work to protect the findings, arguing that “the whole city is full of these vestiges so if we had to stop the work, no one could build, work or plough anywhere in the city” (“Restos”, 2006, para. 6, author’s translation from Spanish). Instead, they proposed to build a museum to show the findings. However, four years have passed since the inauguration of the airport and nothing has been done with the vestiges so far. This event reflects the supremacy of the space over time described by Lefebvre as a hallmark of modernity:

Our time, then, this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is consumed, exhausted, and that is all. It leaves no traces. It is concealed in space, hidden under a pile of debris to be disposed of as soon as possible; after all, rubbish is a pollutant. This manifest expulsion of time is arguably one of the hallmarks of modernity. (1974, 95-96)

In the municipality’s conceived space of the new airport featuring the desired future of a global city region, the vestiges of pre-Columbian cultures did not fit; or, rather, they could be accommodated but confined to specific spaces such as museums, where they would not appear as part of the present or future, but be consigned to the past and only seen by those expressly interested in them.

Looking at the new airport as a finished, operating structure, the first impression, upon approaching it, is a view of a large highway constructed as the main access to it. Beyond the size and design of this highway, which is bigger and more illuminated than other Ecuadorian roads, there is something else that attracts attention: from about two kilometers before the airport, it is flanked by giant billboards, breaking the view of the rural landscape (Figure 0.9). The billboards, of around 24 square meters each, are imposed on the landscape at regular intervals. In 2014, most of them advertised Samsung, Movistar (a Telefónica Mviles company) and North American restaurants. Predominantly featuring green and blue colors, the billboards seemed to be competing with the sky above the horizon and the huge green mountains surrounding the airport space.



**Figure 0.9** Highway and advertisements near the new Mariscal Sucre airport (2014). Photos by the author.

The following description by the Billboard Liberation Front (BLF) accurately captures the visual impact of billboards on the urban landscape:

Larger than life, subtle as war, they assault your senses with a complex coda of commercial instructions, the messenger RNA of capitalism. Every time you get in a car, or ride a bus, or witness a sporting event, you receive their instructions. You can't run and you can't hide, because your getaway route is lined to the horizon with signs, and your hidey-hole has a panoramic view of an 8-sheet poster panel. (2017)

The fact that the route leading to the new airport is flanked by these artifacts shows the extent to which the space of the new airport is conceived as a commercial space. Through catchy slogans and bright colors, billboards are designed to compel attention (Burnett, 2007) and to convince passersby to consume products produced by international enterprises. In this case, the advertisements are in Spanish and thus predominantly geared towards a local market, but nevertheless the main feeling produced when driving on the highway towards the airport is of a placelessness, in accordance with Augé's notion of the non-place (1995), since the same type of billboards are found along the roads to all the world's larger airports.

As mentioned before, the development, design, finance, construction, operation management and maintenance of the new MSA is in the hands of the Quiport Corporation. According to Augusto Barrera, the renegotiation of the construction of the new airport was a kind of "war" between the municipality and the corporation, while the financial and legal context was so complex that the architectural design was never a priority. To

redesign the facade of the airport or modify the structures would have taken two or three more years. As Quiport is in charge of the management of the airport, the municipality has very little influence on the concessions and use of the airport spaces (A. Barrera, personal communication, February 27, 2015). The result is that the infrastructure of the airport resembles the airports of other cities with ambitions to become global city-regions; its design lacks local characteristics and mainly consists of standard, basic forms.



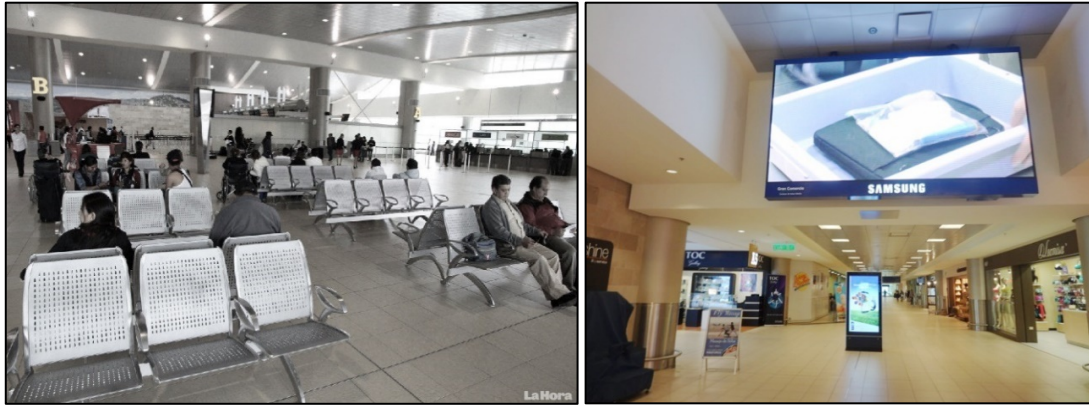
**Figure 0.10** The new airport. Photo retrieved from <http://www.aeropuertos.net>.

**Figure 0.11** The new airport Mariscal Antonio José de Sucre in Quito-Ecuador. Photo by Quito Turismo. Retrieved from <http://www.quito.com.ec>.

Accordingly, the Passenger Terminal building resembles a concrete box, with a slightly waved roof and a stone facade (Figures 1.10 and 1.11). The absence of color and the lack of any distinctive features transform the structure into a non-place. Except for the name, which could still be linked to other places given Mariscal Sucre's biography, the airport is completely generic. The same sense of being in a non-place arises when contemplating the interior of the airport: the uniform color of the walls and the metallic chairs give the terminal a cold atmosphere, while the stairs and the corridors make it clear that they are only there to be functional. The dominant impression created by the interior of the airport is that the passengers are just users, numbers passing through an enormous, efficient machine constructed in accordance with the neocapitalist model.

The billboards along the highway leading to the airport are echoed in the large electronic Samsung screens placed everywhere inside the terminal (Figure 0.13). Comparing the interior with the exterior, both appear as commercialized spaces with a similar aesthetic and ruled by corporate brands. The annulment of any sense of localness through the use of global brands promotes a sense of globalism, since these are brands that could be found anywhere in the world.





**Figure 0.12** Samsung screens inside the new airport (2014). Photo by the author.

**Figure 0.13** Interior of the new airport (2014). Photo retrieved from <http://www.lahora.com.ec>.

Another feature that reinforces the idea of passengers-as-consumers is the insertion of the concept of the mall throughout the airport space. The main building has a shopping area called *Mall del Cielo* (Sky Mall) comprising twenty-six stores. Eleven have been reserved for food and drinks, and fifteen sell diverse products such as clothes, books and magazines (“26 marcas”, 2013; “Grandes cadenas”, 2013). Significantly, on Quiport’s web page<sup>11</sup> what is called *Mall del Cielo* covers the entire space of the airport, removing any conceptual separation between the airport and the mall. The website describes the *Mall del Cielo* as follows:

*Mall del Cielo* has been created integrating the shops of the Airport of Quito with a commercial environment that complies with the expectations of the passenger and the user, offering products at an international airport level. We want that our passengers and visitors have a pleasant experience, which satisfies their tastes and needs through a varied selection of products and high quality services with competitive prices. It is what we call “A HIGH EXPERIENCE”. We invite you to enjoy and to buy in *Mall del Cielo*, a high experience.<sup>12</sup>

This description underlines the new airport’s global aspirations, highlighting the international orientation of the space rather than any links to the national or local, which are transcended in the “high experience” offered by the mall.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.quiport.com/es/mall-del-cielo.html>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.quiport.com/es/mall-del-cielo.html>.

A shopping mall is a distinctly North American structure “whose spread all over the world can serve as something of an epidemiological map of Americanization, or postmodernization, or globalization” (Jameson, 2003, p. 69). According to Guayasamin, the integration of the mall into the new airport space follows the same capitalist logic as the urban development of Quito:

in the old airport at least you could see the landscape, and you had an idea of the geography, even if you were ignorant about Ecuadorian culture or indigenous cosmovision, you could have an idea of the territory. Now, the Mall has replaced that view. When you arrive, you are in front of an element of homogenization and internalization, a structure that reflects the “values” of a capitalistic society. (Personal communication, January 15, 2014, author’s translation from Spanish)

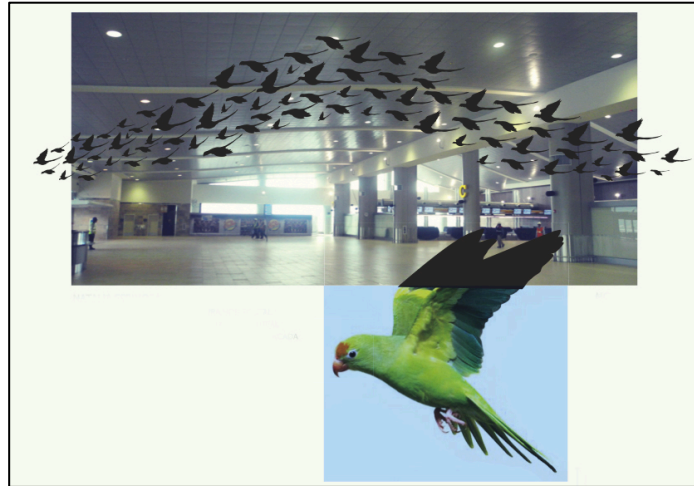
Guayasamín’s words recall Augé’s reflections on the non-place, where territory and geography are excluded, and the user/passenger is relieved of his usual determinants. The replacement of a specific geography by the generic mall signals how the global is understood as entailing capitalist development.

This becomes even clearer when analyzing, for example, the restaurants available to the visitors. Inside the *Mall del Cielo*, the Mexican firm Mera Corporation has the concession for eleven food and drinks stores, and has already opened restaurants with brands of North American origins like Starbucks, Häagen Dazs, Domino’s Pizza, Johnny Rockets and T.G.I. Friday’s. Notably, the firm has also created “two exclusive brands for the Ecuadorian market” called *Darwin’s Bar* and *Amazonia Café*, which include on their menu’s, among snacks and drinks to go, some typical Ecuadorian food. According to the executive director of the Mera Corporation, these restaurants “are the outcome of a comprehensive study concerning the tastes and preferences of the Ecuadorian people who are proud of their natural and historical resources” (Mera in “26 marcas”, 2013, para. 1, author’s translation from Spanish). It is revealing that the executives and planners in charge of the new airport hired a multinational company to find out the preferences and tastes of Ecuadorian people, who are said to care about their environment and their past, while at the same time conceiving and building a globalized space without any concrete relation to that environment and past. Notably, in the first months the two “Ecuadorian” restaurants were open, they received many complaints. Because of the high prices,

Ecuadorian families could not afford the cost of meals and drinks. Clearly, these restaurants, too, are oriented more towards the visiting tourist than the Ecuadorian citizen (as their non-Spanish names also indicate).

An analysis of the infrastructure of the new airport and the use of its indoor spaces reveals that the ideas of the city region and globalization associated with the airport as a conceived space by the municipal authorities has resulted in an actualized space of abstract homogenization, a veritable non-place in which the role assigned to passengers and other people passing through it is exclusively that of the user-consumer, and where the local context is either erased or also commercialized as part of global capitalism.

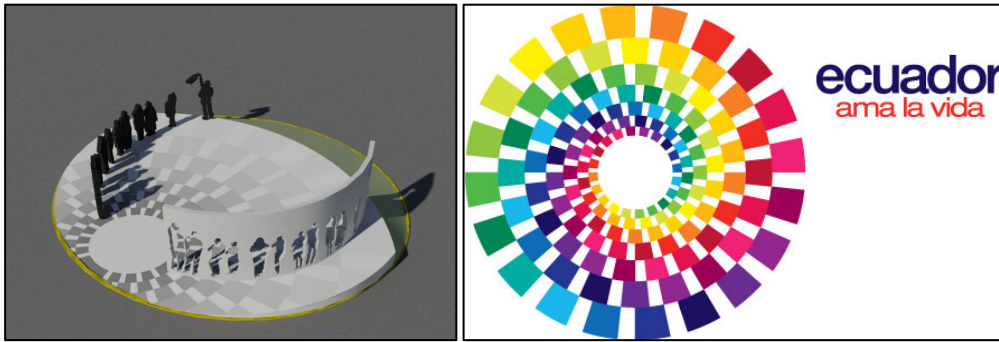
In 2012 and 2013, two projects that sought to bring the arts and a relation with the local context into the airport space were presented to the authorities in charge of the construction of the airport, but neither was implemented. A Quito art gallery was the coordinator of one of these projects; its proposal included paintings, pictures, sculptures and installations made by eight renowned Ecuadorian artists, including Dolores Andrade, Marcelo Aguirre, Paula Barragán, Miguel Betancourt, Natalia Espinosa, Geovanny Verdezoto and Jaime Zapata (see Figure 0.14). It also foresaw the installation of a collection of 40 pre-Columbian figures in one of the airport walls to show off the richness of pre-Columbian aesthetics so that “the passengers that walk in the airport every day could value and therefore appropriate the history of the country” (Gallery, 2012, author’s translation from Spanish). The main objective of the project was to enhance the aesthetics of the airport space and to make visible the talent of Ecuadorian artists. The gallery director argued: “We think that a space so representative of the Ecuadorian capital city as an airport deserves artworks made specifically for the place, great creations with visual and conceptual content, replacing the well-trodden path of folklorism that unfortunately has been used as an image of the country” (Participant 3, personal communication, January 16, 2014, author’s translation from Spanish). When the director alludes to folklorism, she refers to the term as described by Martí (1999) in terms of the use and veneration of the content of past and traditional culture, such as particular legends, clothes and music. From her perspective, this folklorism is perceived as negative, since it does not represent the diversity of the country’s past or present; what she rejects, then, is not any inclusion of the past in the airport space (as noted, the gallery proposal sought to display pre-Columbian figures as well as contemporary art), but the inclusion of a particular, limited view of that past.



**Figure 0.14** Three hundred Parrots - Proposal for the new airport by the artist Natalia Espinosa (2012). Photo courtesy of Natalia Espinosa. Three hundred parrots (native to Ecuador) made of plastic resin or balsa wood were designed to highlight the contrast between an artificial space (the airport) and a natural element (a flock of parrots). The parrots would welcome the visitor, showing them the diversity and exuberance of Ecuadorian nature.

The director's desire to put "artworks made specifically for the place" in the new airport further distinguishes her vision of the airport space from how it was conceived by the municipal authorities. As I have shown, the new airport was not supposed to represent the Ecuadorian capital city as a specific location with a distinct history, but as part of a global city-region oriented towards the rest of the world and towards the future.

At the beginning, Quiport was enthusiastic about the project, even asking for more art works such as sculptures or paintings; this period of negotiation between the gallery and the company lasted for around eight months. Once the project had been completely negotiated with Quiport, it was presented to the Mayor of Quito. After this presentation, the potential of the project was realized and the authorities received other similar proposals (Participant 3, personal communication, January 16, 2014). However, the gallery never received a formal response and, in the end, none of the proposals were carried out. According to the director, the decision was based on political interests (Participant 3, personal communication, January 16, 2014): to carry out the proposal meant an economic benefit to the artists and people involved in the project, so maybe the authorities preferred to give the project to artists they already knew or had a link with.



**Figure 0.15** The Return - Proposal for the new airport (2014). Photo courtesy of Fernando Rivera.  
**Figure 0.16** Logo of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Tourism.

Fernando Rivera, the creator of *The Wailing Wall*, also presented a proposal for the new airport called El Retorno (*The Return*). According to Rivera, the sculpture located at the old airport should not be moved to the new airport because it was constructed for a specific place and referred to a specific period in Ecuadorian history that it sought to make part of the country's collective memory (F. Rivera, personal communication, December 26, 2013, author's translation from Spanish). El Retorno (Figure 0.15) refers to the result of financial incentives provided by the government to encourage some Ecuadorian citizens to come back from Europe and the US. According to SICREMI (2014), during the period 2002-2013, around 150,000 Ecuadorians left Spain to return home. With the new sculpture, Rivera wanted to make this reality visible. The proposal was based on the same silhouettes used in the *Wailing Wall*, but this time they are shown both as negative cutouts and as positive shapes, to convey their return and the filling of the empty spaces created when they left for other countries. It is interesting to note that in order to make the project "sellable", Rivera incorporated the logo of the Ministry of Tourism into the design as part of the floor (

Figure 0.16). This logo, which "is based in the sun, in life, in the soil, in mega diversity, in pre-Columbian designs, flowers, fauna (...)" (Ehlers in "Ecuador ama", 2010, para. 3, author's translation from Spanish), was created in 2010 by the Ministry of Tourism to promote the country abroad and it quickly became a State brand. Together with the slogan "Ecuador loves life", it intends to reflect that Ecuador is a diverse, *pluricultural* country, as is also stated in the Constitution, where it is noted that the country treats with respect the diversity of groups within its territory and their institutional, social and cultural differences. To an extent, then, both the unrealized gallery proposal and Rivera's *The Return* are examples of the way the new airport can only accommodate elements that comply with its realized abstract, commercialized space.

The buildings of the new airport were designed to transform Quito into a global city-region. It was under that term that the municipal authorities aimed to promote the city, and therefore the country, as part of a global dynamic in which the efficient movement of merchandise and passengers is privileged as a marker of economic development. As part of the notion of city-region, the municipal authorities also stressed the importance of promoting a diverse and plural identity that could reflect the new situation of Quito as a growing city. When analyzing the conceived space as realized in the new buildings of the airport, however, what is found is a space that fully accords with Augé's non-place of supermodernity in the sense that it offers consumers advertisements, signage and specific instructions that they only have to follow to negotiate the space successfully. The new airport is not a relational or historical place, but a space that promotes consumption and a homogenized identity. The airport, meant to be an important step towards the transformation of Quito into a city-region that embraces plurality and diversity, in reality appears as a giant shopping mall that conveys a sense not of plurality and diversity, but of bland homogeneity, and that does not in any concrete way promote a sense of belonging to the city or the country.

## **Conclusions**

The new Mariscal Sucre airport received several awards during its construction for corporate social responsibility and environmental protection (A. Carrión, 2016, p. 259). In the years after its inauguration, it has been prized for service quality, the quality of its VIP lounges and as the best regional South American Airport by the World Airport Awards (Aeropuerto Quito, 2017). This shows that the municipal authorities have been successful in implementing their conception of the new airport space.

In my analysis of the old airport I showed how it existed as a lived space rather than a non-place. Even if the buildings of the old airport were not particularly original in terms of their design, during its 53 years of operation, the infrastructure came alive through various economic, political and social developments that infused it with meaning and a sense of the local for its users and those living around it. Located in the middle of the city, the airport was a landmark in Quito; due to its closeness to residential areas, people were used to the presence of the airport as an accessible place to encounter important people when they visited the country. From 1999, moreover, the space became closely associated with the consequences of the economic crisis as the site where people took the step of becoming economic migrants, leaving their families behind to start a new

life in more prosperous, distant countries. The experience of the families in the airport was marked by *La Despedida* (*The Goodbye*, later dubbed *The Wailing Wall*), a public sculpture honoring the sacrifice of the migrants and the pain of their relatives when seeing them off. The space of the airport was also central to a major political event – the failed escape of President Lucio Gutiérrez in 2005. In all these ways, the old airport appeared as a lived space that played an active role in the everyday dynamics of Quito’s urban environment. In accordance with the local approach to the significance of airports (Lassen and Galland, 2014), its space had great meaning for local populations and their identities.

On the contrary, the new airport was conceived as a non-place in Augé’s sense, associated with supermodernity and leaving very little room for localization and other ways of using it as a lived space. The neocapitalist logic of the new airport promotes business centers and major productive entities, and, as Lefebvre asserts when talking about abstract spaces, “within this space the town – once the forcing-house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and center of historical space – has disintegrated” (1974, p. 53). Replacing a more relational and social identity with a consumer identity, when entering the new airport the traveler or visitor experiences a myriad of advertisements and symbols that emphasize the necessity of consumption to being part of the globalized world, which, in concrete terms, is expressed in the omnipresence of global companies offering the same experience they do in other countries. The new airport space is characterized by a kind of globalized airport aesthetics that lacks any original features and expresses a sense of blandness; all you can see in the space is what can be seen at any other large international airport. This space can only be lived as a non-place in which the trialectics spatiality-historicity-sociality is completely broken. Any sense of Ecuador’s cultural diversity is obscured by the homogenizing effects of the global airport aesthetics, embraced by a political elite obsessed with promoting a specific notion of modernity that privileges the tourist’s and businessperson’s experience over the Quito inhabitant’s experience. Global aspirations, then, are materialized by obscuring local traditions and identities.

Nowadays, the airport is mostly lived in accordance with its conception as a non-place. However, the migration process also continues and the airport is still a lived place of socialization and local interactions to some extent: when it was inaugurated, for example, local people came out to see it and, as Fredy Egüez, manager of the Airport Services Enterprise, explained: “Mainly during the weekends, we have had a high number of visits, surpassing expectations. People go to visit the airport, not necessarily because

they will travel or pick someone up, but to visit the installations. This has caused some congestion on the highway and in the parking area” (“En 12 días”, 2013, para. 7, author’s translation from Spanish).



**Figure 0.17** Mural Quito y sus encantos [Quito and its charms] by artist Jorge Perugachi (2016). Available at: <https://www.metroecuador.com.ec/ec/noticias/2016/10/12/se-develara-mural-aeropuerto-mariscal-sucre-habitat-iii.html>.

In 2016, to receive the visitors of the UN HABITAT Conference, a mural called “Quito y sus encantos” [Quito and its charms], depicting the historical center of the city, its churches and mostly indigenous characters, was placed in the international arrival of the airport (Figure 0.17). Rather paradoxically, the mural effects a localization of the space in the context of a global conference. It also reflects the criticisms made by the director of the art gallery of the use of folklorism as an attempt to represent the country and its past from a narrow, uniform perspective that erases the existence of other cultural identities and histories.

From my analysis of the old and new Quito airports and the ways in which their spaces were conceived and used, it can be concluded that the construction of an airport capable of accommodating local social dynamics depends not only on the particular identities it endorses but also on whether it offers local people the right to places of encounter and exchange, to a lived airport that responds to their practices and feelings. Adjusting Lefebvre’s argument about the right to the city (1968/1996), it would be interesting to think, in future research, about to the importance of the *right to the airport* as entailing the right of citizens to produce an airport as a place that not only fosters consumption following an alienating aesthetic, but responds to social life as a praxis on the part of local individuals that have the capacity to propose, invent and create new forms of space.