

Communication and Public Space in the Digital Age: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Mexico in the 21st Century

Comunicación y espacio público en la era digital: perspectivas interdisciplinarias en México en el siglo XXI

■ Zaragoza, Mario (coord.) (2022) *Comunicar y habitar el espacio público: Transformaciones históricas, expresiones artísticas y confrontaciones públicas*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México ■

Alicia González Lira*

Received: October 26th, 2023

Accepted: November 8th, 2024

The twenty-first century is marked by new forms of communication, placing us within a global context of social interaction in which the internet and social media have opened previously unimaginable channels of exchange. While the digital divide remains a significant challenge in Mexico, these new modes of communication compel us to rethink social interaction—and, consequently, the appropriation of both physical and digital public space. Within this context, communication studies become particularly relevant, as they provide the tools to generate responses and reinterpret social reality.

In addition, following the COVID-19 pandemic, urban spaces underwent rapid transformations, with a growing emphasis on public health and citizen coexistence.

In contrast, digital environments became channels of protest—spaces of expression for activist groups seeking to insert themselves into public and political debate. This appropriation of space also led to the transformation of institutions such as museums, traditional media companies, and government agencies, all of which were compelled to improvise new digital narratives and reposition themselves within this emerging landscape.

Against this backdrop, the collective volume presented here offers a valuable resource for understanding the complexities of these changes and their societal impact. The scholars who contribute to this volume provide an interdisciplinary and original perspective on crucial topics, ranging from the symbolic appropriation of public space to digital activism,

* Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa, Mexico. E-mail: <alicia_glz@live.com.mx>.

offering a distinctive lens through which to examine communication and the construction of public space in the digital age.

The edited volume, *Comunicar y habitar el espacio público: Transformaciones históricas, expresiones artísticas y confrontaciones políticas*, represents an interdisciplinary effort by a group of researchers to explore the intrinsic relationship between communication and public space in twenty-first-century Mexico. This study aims to examine how communication and social interaction both shape and are shaped by public space. The volume addresses key issues such as the historical construction of the public and the private, the influence of information and communication technologies, and how the global climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have altered the dynamics of public space.

The researchers' interdisciplinary approach encompasses a wide range of fields—from communication and politics to art and history—allowing them to explore the dynamics between communication and public space in a comprehensive and nuanced manner. The contributions underscore the importance of considering spatial and temporal dimensions in analyzing communicative problems and in understanding how everyday life is constructed through communicative and public order processes. Public space is not limited to streets and plazas; it also includes digital space, which has undergone significant transformations in recent decades. Each chapter examines a particular aspect of how public space—both physical and digital—becomes a site for communication, political expression, resistance, and the construction of meaning.

The participating researchers come from diverse disciplines, enriching the study by offering interdisciplinary perspectives on key issues in contemporary society. The volume also provides a rich perspective on how interactions among people, places, and sociopolitical dynamics shape life in a city as vast and complex as Mexico City. It explores how cultural manifestations, activism, online communication, media ownership, and everyday life converge in public space to contribute to the construction of urban identities and narratives.

Topics include the symbolic appropriation of public space, the relationship between cities and public art, the influence of urban space on human experience, feminist demonstrations in Mexico City, the appropriation of public space in digital environments and online activism, as well as resistance in the digital public sphere. The volume also examines media control in Mexico City, the symbolic and political role of the National Palace, the experiences of migrants in public space, and the adaptation of museums to virtual spaces during the pandemic. Together, these themes provide valuable insight for understanding not only public space in Mexico but also its significance in other similar contexts undergoing significant change due to digital convergence.

This collective work is significant because it addresses the concept of public space and the construction of its meaning through dialogue and the symbolic representation of space in different cultural and historical contexts. It recognizes that economic, political, gender-based, and communicative unequal-

ities can produce disparities in how public space is appropriated and how its meaning is constructed. Nevertheless, it highlights the importance of dialogue and reflexivity in the quest to acknowledge otherness and to achieve a deeper understanding of shared space. In this sense, words and their meanings possess political and symbolic potential in shaping the city's spiritual universe and in building a collective identity. At the same time, the authors acknowledge that material inequality cannot be ignored and may influence how different groups appropriate and confer meaning upon public space.

First, spatial appropriation can be approached from critical theory, which holds that occupying and using public space occurs within power relations in which certain social groups wield greater capacity to influence and define that use than others. From this standpoint, appropriating public space entails a struggle for recognition and equality in defining and employing the space.

Phenomenology of communication, by contrast, emphasizes the experiential dimension of spatial appropriation, positing that perception and subjective experience are fundamental to constructing the space's meaning. Appropriation thus involves a close relationship between subjective experience and the symbolic construction of space, focusing on how people make places their own through memory, identification, and belonging.

Practically speaking, any approach to public-space appropriation must acknowledge the material and symbolic inequalities that shape access to and use of that space and

must propose concrete actions to transform these conditions. This involves not only public policies and collective action but also the creation of new ways of inhabiting and coexisting in public spaces—ways that value diversity and foster the active, meaningful participation of all residents in constructing and using the commons.

Meaningful appropriation of public space extends beyond its physical, tangible dimension. It involves the social construction of the meanings individuals attribute to a place and how, through daily interaction and experience, inhabitants build and reconfigure contested boundaries and narratives. Understanding meaningful appropriation in this way reveals that space itself is socially produced through communicative action and is fundamental to modern political life, providing the setting for public conversations, interactions, and debate. Thus, it is essential to identify not only the physical limits of public space but also the meanings people assign to it and the ways those meanings shape everyday use. Importantly, meaningful appropriation concerns symbolic occupation as well—the capacity of individuals and groups to endow public spaces with sense and significance. This is achieved through both verbal and non-verbal interaction with others present in the space.

Consequently, meaningful appropriation is not solely individual but also collective: meaning is forged in relationships among the people and groups who inhabit and use public space. In this respect, meaningful appropriation can serve as a form of resistance and social transformation, enabling

individuals and groups to challenge power structures and hegemonic narratives operating in the public sphere.

Political and artistic expressions that lay claim to public space entail understanding a meaningful world that phenomenologically draws people closer to the places and symbolic forms that directly interpellate them. In this context, the appropriation of digital public space is equally crucial, for it facilitates symbolic interaction between users and government entities while providing a forum for collectives, activists, social movements, and other social phenomena to engage in dialogue. This focus is essential in contemporary society, where the digital sphere has become an integral component of the public realm.

In sum, this collective volume offers a multifaceted lens through which to analyze and understand both physical and digital public spaces. It presents a view of contemporary social interaction that is not limited to dominant voices but instead opens avenues for communication and participation by social movements, collective activities, activism, feminism, and other emerging phenomena. Moreover, it shows how traditional media have evolved in the digital era, adopting new discursive forms. The growing influence of online communications and diverse platforms has created new possibilities for appropriating public space—possibilities whose full scope we have yet to discover. Taken together, the contributions provide fresh perspectives on how these spaces are being transformed and appropriated in social, political, and artistic dimensions within Mexico City.

About the author

ALICIA GONZÁLEZ LIRA holds a PhD in Administrative Sciences from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM). She is a faculty member at the Sociedad de Administración Pública, Educación y Estudios Multidisciplinarios, S. C., and an advisor at the Political Communication Laboratory at Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana–Iztapalapa. Her research interests include political communication, public management and governance, cultural policies and cultural management, U.S. presidential campaigns (2008-2024), political marketing, political consulting, political discourse, and campaign spots. Among her most recent publications are: “The Image of Presidential Candidates in the United States (2008-2020): An Analysis of Frames in Political Introduction Spots” (2025) *Revista Más Poder Local*, 60; (with Aquiles Chihu Amparán) “El framing de los spots de los candidatos presidenciales en Estados Unidos 2020” (2023) *Norteamérica*, 18(1).

References

Zaragoza, Mario (coord.) (2022) *Comunicar y habitar el espacio público: Transformaciones históricas, expresiones artísticas y confrontaciones públicas*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.