CITIES

in the Shadow of Pandemic and Climate Crisis

New quality of space and reality

Edited by
Ewelina Biczyńska
and Mirosława Czerny

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Contents

III. Contemporary urban processes

IV. The crisis and the response

Social representations, public space, and consumption in the city of Metepec, State of Mexico, Mexico

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1. Introduction

To conduct studies on a city implies facing opposing views. Some of them have brought into question the very concept of a city, or, more precisely, its currency in relation to the spatial and social complexity of the conurbations of large cities, constituting what is currently referred to as megalopolises. This physical growth of large cities brings with it a series of social, economic, structural, and territorial planning challenges; provision of educational equipment, health, services, insecurity, poverty, aging of the population and therefore the demand for specialised equipment focused on the care of the elderly are just some of the most obvious problems present in this space.

In the body of research on the problems of the city, there are some publications which emphasise the study of its structural components, like Unikel (1976), Garza (2003), Capel (2002). Others have taken urban spatiality as their object of analysis, for example Cabrales (2005), Duhau and Giglia (2004a, 2004b), Indovinia (2004), Janoschka and Glasze (2003), Ramírez (2003), Roitman (2004). There are also some which focus on problems such as housing, like Duhau (1998), Mollá (2006), Rodríguez (2006), Maya (1999), Ziccardi (2015); others have highlighted the new processes of exclusion taking place in historic centres: Nieto (2005), Melé et al. (2003), Sabatini and Cáceres (2001), Ziccardi (2008), Lindón (2003). Others still analyse the subjective expressions of individual cities, such as López (2005), Reguillo (2000), Lindón (2003), Lowenthal (1977), Peñalva (1997). In other words, the latter group of publications studies the construction of situations and scenarios through social consciousness and language, giving shape to social phenomena that are the product of beliefs, customs, the intervention of economic actors, urban policy initiatives, consumers with high economic capacity, each with their particular

way of understanding how space should be organised when creating a city, that is, a way of establishing a social environment correspondent to their reality.

The present work is part of the conceptualisation through which we have sought to interpret and analyse the subjective complexity of the city. It should be clarified that this study of the city of Metepec does not conceive of this urban centre as a totality, since there are different groups that cohabitate in it, thus forming a population which is not homogenous but in fact highly diverse. In this sense, we do not share the position held by some scholars studying urban centres, according to whom thinking about the city from any perspective implies doing so in terms of a totality.

For this reason, we take as our object of analysis the social representations produced by the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods and urban centres in the Municipality of Metepec in terms of consumption, putting emphasis on the residents as well as the users – producers – of the urban fabric, since they are the ones who appropriate urban spaces and give them meaning by assigning them their qualities and attributes.

From this perspective, the objective is to analyse the changes in the social representations of consumers of urban production in the Municipality of Metepec by taking a closer look at streets and commercial plazas, public spaces in which the symbolic production of consumption takes place in this urban society.

2. Methodology

The research conducted is qualitative in nature; in order to gather information supporting the argument in terms of the presence of gated communities, public spaces, and consumption, as well as their manifestations in the analysed territory, qualitative variables have been observed. The methodological process was twofold. The first part was carried out with the use of documentation techniques which made it possible to identify the categories of analysis, the theoretical principles, as well as the definitions of concepts around the phenomenon of gated communities and the urban image.

Identified based on the theoretical principles were the variables and indicators which would best reflect the sense of isolation, among which the following stand out: the presence of security measures such as perimeter fences, guardhouses, security guards, electrified fences, barrier arms, video cameras, dogs, among others. The field visits empirically confirmed the presence of streets that had been closed and given a private character, limiting access to these spaces through different security devices, thus accentuating the restricted nature of the property.

The second part of the research was carried out with the use of field techniques. The initial stage consisted in observation through which we identified physical trends in the urban image imposed in the Municipality of Metepec as

a result of the construction of consumption-oriented spaces, such as plazas and shopping malls, as well as housing in gated communities.

Employing semi-structured interviews with key informants made it possible to obtain qualitative information and data that would otherwise have been unlikely to be collected, such as the reasons that prompt the inhabitants of the municipality to adopt cultural values different from traditional ones and the changes in the modes of consumption in new commercial spaces and services. The analysis and interpretation of this information has given us a greater understanding of the transformation process in the meaning of public space.

Twenty interviews were conducted with residents of gated residential communities. The information obtained has allowed us to identify in general terms the subjective perceptions of these actors regarding the areas in question, such as the sense of security and feelings of exclusion and segregation in relation to the areas of the city that they do not believe to be part of their group.

3. Origin of the concept of social representations

In the theoretical conceptualisations of social representation, authors such as León (2002), Ibarra (2000), Jodelet (1984), Rizo (2012), and others unanimously pinpoint the origins of the idea to the work by Moscovici (1979) called *Psychoanalysis, Its Image and Its Public*. In it, the author establishes the theoretical and analytical bases with which, coming from the psychoanalytic perspective, he intends to study the meaning of social representations, understood not only as manifestations or mental products serving to understand everyday actions and common sense, but also, according to Moscovici himself (1979), as symbolic constructs that are created and recreated over the course of social interactions. With this logic, common sense can be understood as the language between the reciprocal influence exerted by the subject–object relationship and vice versa.

According to Rizo (2012), the immediate precedent to social representation can be found in the term 'collective representation', coined by Durkheim (1986). For the latter, collective representations are forms of knowledge or socially constructed ideation which cannot be explained as individual life events or by resorting to individual psychology but should rather be studied from the collective point of view.

"Durkheim was the first to propose the term 'collective representation'. He wanted to define the specificity of social thought in relation to individual thought. For him, individual representation is a purely mental phenomenon irreducible to the cerebral activity that makes it possible; collective representation is not reduced to the sum of the representations of the individuals who make up a society. In fact, it is one of the signs of the primacy of the social over the individual, one spills over the other" (Moscovici, 1979, p. 16).

Based on the concept of 'collective representation', Durkheim lays the epistemological foundations that differentiate the object of study of sociology from the one pursued by psychology. As pointed out by Mora (2002, p. 6), "Durkheim dares to make the difference between sociology and Psychology: the former was to analyse everything which regards collective representations and the latter what pertains to individual representations. Consequently, Durkheim (1895) defined the field of Social Psychology by arguing that it should study how social representations are called and excluded, how they merge or become distinct from each other".

Decades later, this differentiation between both disciplines was embraced by Serge Moscovici, who "took up these approaches and developed a theory within Social Psychology with a marked sociological bent at a time when the common denominator of research in Psychology was the individual, due to North American influence. With his theory of social representations, Moscovici integrates the contributions of various disciplines in Social Psychology within the rapidly expanding European context" (Mora, 2002, p. 6).

4. Social representations

Social representations have been incorporated into the study of social sciences as a relatively recent theory that provides a theoretical foundation for social psychology and sociology. Therefore, the concept of representation, by itself, is defined in many disparate ways. Moreover, the goal of its application "is not simply to isolate and group a set of characteristics common to a certain number of objects; it is to subsume the variable in the permanent, the individual in the social" (Moscovici, 1979, p. 28).

Moscovici (1979) sees representations as dynamic; they are not only mental products, but symbolic constructs that are created and recreated over the course of social interactions. They are linked to the ways of understanding and communicating reality; these "are not only ways of acquiring and reproducing knowledge, but also of providing meaning to social reality. Their basic function is to transform the unknown into something natural, taken for granted, common" (Rizo, 2012, p. 61).

According to Moscovici (1979, p. 28), the notion of social representation requires closer analysis. Every representation is composed of socialised figures and expressions. Altogether, social representation is a means of organising images and language, because it cuts out and symbolises acts and situations that are or become common. Passively adopted, it is accepted as the reflection, in the individual or collective consciousness, of an object – a bundle of ideas external to it.

In this sense, "social representation is a particular modality of knowledge whose function is the elaboration of behaviours and communication between individuals" (Moscovici, 1979, p. 17), "presenting to the members

of a community as a means for their exchanges and as a code to clearly name and classify the parts of the world, of their individual or collective history" (Moscovici, 1979, p. 18). "Social representation is an organised corpus of knowledge and one of the mental activities through which people make physical and social reality intelligible, integrate themselves in a group or in daily relations of exchange, release the powers of their imagination" (Moscovici, 1979, pp. 17–18).

According to Moscovici (1979, p. 32), "a social representation is a 'preparation for action', not only insofar as it guides behaviour, but especially insofar as it reshapes and reconstitutes the elements of the environment in which the behaviour must take place. It comes to give meaning to behaviour, to integrate it into a network of relationships where it is linked to its object". "To represent something, a state, is not simply to unfold it, to repeat it, or reproduce it; it is to reconstitute it, to retouch it, to change its text – the communication that is established between concept and perception, through the piercing of one into the other, transforming the common concrete substance, gives the impression of 'realism', of the materiality of abstractions, because we can act with them, and of the abstraction of materialities, because they express a precise order" (Moscovici, 1979, p. 39).

Individual or social representations make the world what we think it is or what it should be. They show us that at every instant, an absent object is added and a present object is modified. But this dialectical game has a greater meaning. If something that is absent shocks us and triggers a whole elaboration of thought and of the group, it does not happen because of the nature of the object, but first of all because of its strangeness, and then because of the fact that it lies outside our usual universe (Moscovici, 1979, p. 39).

According to Moscovici (1979), these social representations manage to make the unusual familiar and the familiar unusual, to change the whole universe while ensuring it remains our own. All this is made possible by the narrative element, that is to say, the meta-narratives imposed in the societies of the twenty-first century have made it possible to weaken the common sense and straightforward representation and have given way to the image, to the sensation, pleasure, and enjoyment caused by the new visual digital culture, which is materialised in new lifestyles based on purely hedonistic consumption.

5. Approach to the notion of public spaces

The difference between the public and the private is one of Greek society's contributions to the European political thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Greeks developed a distinction between the *oikos* and the *polis*; the former was linked to the private sphere, equivalent to the term 'house', the sphere in which the morality of society is organised and instituted. It was understood as the basic unit of society.

Aristotle (Aristóteles, 1988) referred to the *oikos* as a naturally organised community for the development of daily activities, while the *polis* was understood in a more complex manner by conceptualising it as the city-state. The city symbolised the place where the political and cultural centre of Greek society was situated. The public was represented by the agora, the squares, the public assemblies, the debates on citizens' public problems as well as the functioning of institutions.

The Romans established the legal, social, and institutional bases for separating the public from the private; they formalised the legal channels for the population to accept the domination of a small group that concentrated economic, political, military, and ideological power over the entire population. The members of the elite led the general public in their thinking, behaviour, moral values, and would be in charge of imparting justice, of reaching consensus to legitimise decision-making. All this linked what is public with the exercise of government power.

Public space is one of the key elements of cities, which, in addition to giving it shape through its spatial organisation, also makes social interrelationships possible, gives the city its character, its attractiveness, identity, sense of its existence, allows us to perceive its morphology, its social, cultural, and economic functionality, channels its growth, and is understood as a public asset of which everyone can make use, as well as the place of social relations *par excellence*.

The current discussion on public space revolves around the progressive disappearance and transformation of the qualities that socially legitimised its common use as a commodity that could be enjoyed by citizens as equals. The importance of urban public spaces as sites for social coexistence is fading from collective consciousness, to be replaced, gradually, by "pseudo-public spaces" where the traditional exchange of goods, ideas, and social experiences has given way to exclusive focus on maximising consumption, as is the case of the mall (Judd, 1995, as cited in Salcedo, 2002, pp. 5–6).

"Some urban theoreticians (Roitman, 2004; Bauman, 2003; Janoschka, Glasze, 2003; Rodríguez, 2006) have referred to the privatisation of public space, such as the streets, gardens, parks, understood as a common good, which results from new forms of urbanisation in which a sense of isolation has been prioritised" (Becerril et al., 2021, p. 66).

"Just as the Fordist-Keynesian mass city involved a redefinition of urban public space and the appearance of new physical components in its structuring, in relation to the city of the mercantile capitalism phase (Soja, 2008, pp. 118–123 and Asher, 2005, pp. 19–27), the post-Fordist-neoliberal city develops its own components of urban space, refunctionalises the 'traditional' public spaces, and even creates new virtual public spaces" (Becerril et al., 2021, p. 66).

In this new international scenario, nationalism becomes more flexible, localism is diluted, national cultures are intermixed and start adopting foreign practices in their customs and traditions. Identities are redefined under

the principles of individualism and the pressing influence of information and communication technologies which are becoming new spaces for coexistence, meeting, and social interaction. This has given way to the formation of new social identities which move the boundaries between various social groups, leading to a high degree of social fragmentation.

"We have reached a moment in which the commercialisation of ways of life no longer meets with structural, cultural, or ideological resistance, and in which the spheres of social and individual life are reorganised according to the logic of consumption" (Lipovetsky, 2006, p. 32).

Under these conditions, the city of the masses has become the city of groups homogenised by consumption who believe themselves to have their own distinctive identities and needs and gather in the public and 'public-private' spaces of the city around shared interests, convictions, ways of life, phobias, and fears.

6. General context of the Municipality of Metepec

Since the 1990s, the municipality of Metepec has experienced excessive construction of gated estates aimed at the provision of commercial, recreational, educational, health, and housing services; most housing has been sold as subdivisions and urban complexes marketed to consumers belonging to the middle and upper social strata; commerce and services have been concentrated in large plazas and shopping malls.

Consequently, large amounts of agricultural land in the municipality have been designated for investments in the tertiary sector, as well as for the construction of medium- and high-rise residential housing, ignoring the land management provisions included in various municipal planning instruments, such as the Municipal Urban Development Plan, Land Management Plans, Partial Plans.

Among other factors, the strategic location of Metepec has made it attractive to investors: it has easy connectivity to Mexico City, located thirty minutes away; the network of toll highways guarantees good access to the cities of Morelia, Guadalajara, Queretaro, Morelos, Hidalgo, Puebla; and the local road infrastructure makes it possible to easily reach the municipalities that make up the Metropolitan Zone of the Toluca Valley. Taking into account these comparative advantages, Metepec has been perceived by domestic and foreign investors as the ideal place to invest in different areas of social life.

6.1. Location of the municipality

According to the Municipal Urban Development Plan of Metepec 2010–2013 and the Bando Municipal de Metepec 2007, the municipality is part of region I Toluca of the State of Mexico (Fig. 1). It is bordered to the north and west

by the Municipality of Toluca, to the south by the municipalities of Calimaya, Mexicaltzingo, and Chapultepec, to the east by the municipalities of Santiago Tianguistenco and San Mateo Atenco. It has an area of 70.43 square kilometres, representing 0.31% of the state surface.
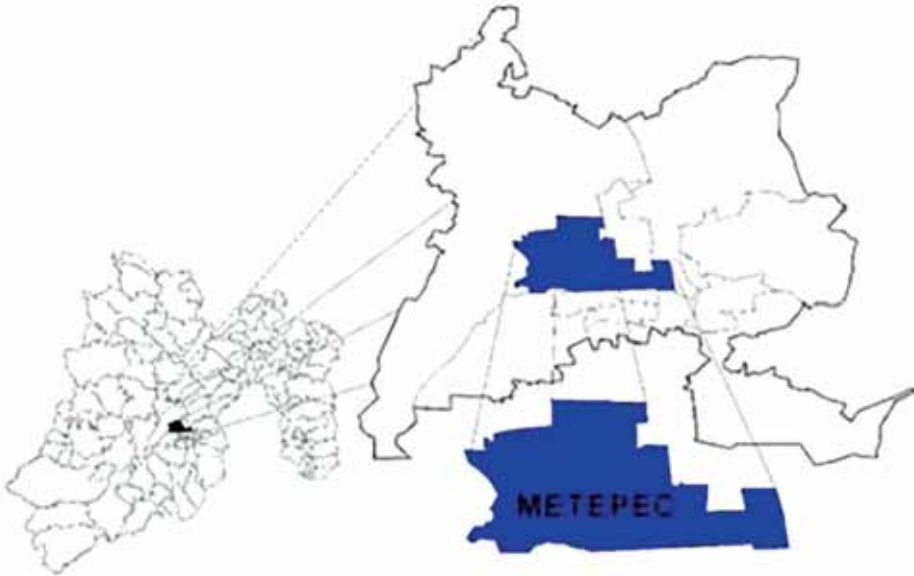
Figure 1. Geographical location

Source: Own elaboration based on the Municipal Urban Development Plan of Metepec, 2010–2013 (H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional de Metepec, 2003)

6.2. Demographic growth of the municipality

Metepec is one of the municipalities that has experienced an accelerated population growth, mainly due to the migratory flows to which it was exposed in the 1980s. According to INEGI, in 1980 the municipality presented its highest annual growth rate with 9.74%, surpassing the rate in the entire state (6.78%); over the decade, Metepec went from 83,030 inhabitants in 1980 to 140,268 in 1990. By the year 2000, the municipal population increased to 194,463 inhabitants, with a growth rate of 2.08%. For the first time since the 1970s, the municipality would note a population growth rate lower than that of the state, with the latter increasing by 2.65% in the same period. During these years, 97.36% of the total municipal population resided in urban centres and only 2.64% in rural areas (H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional de Metepec, 2003).

The year 2010 saw a diminishing trend in the population growth rate, with 214,162 inhabitants registered; in 2015, the number increased to 227,827 and in 2020 – to 242,307.

As shown in Figure 2, Metepec's accelerated population growth lasted until 2000, mainly because it was one of the municipalities which received the greatest migratory flows in the State of Mexico and the entire country. Consequently, it became the municipality offering the largest amount of housing at the regional level, although most of the housing supply was aimed at middle and upper social strata.
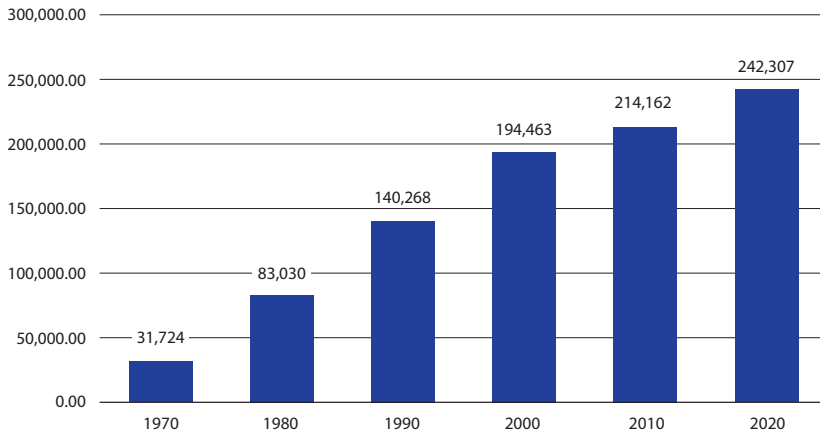
Figure 2. Demographic growth of Metepec, 1970–2020

Source: Own elaboration based on INEGI, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020

In this demographic context, Becerril et al. (2013) have observed that the prevailing trend in housing development in the municipality was the construction of subdivisions, condominiums, and urban complexes. In 2009, there were about 108 horizontal condominiums and eight urban complexes, which encompassed about 4,407 medium- and high-rise residential houses; this is without counting the large areas occupied by shopping centres and shopping malls that have been built in the municipality.

The common characteristic of these buildings is that they are enclosed, with a strong presence of security devices such as the increasingly common perimeter fences, which not only serve to enforce exclusivity through physical limits but are now also implemented as a means of separating the inside from the outside; in addition, the barriers are becoming components of a new urban image that breaks with the traditional character of the municipality.

Gradually, the urban structure has been changed, "the old buildings are perverted, modified, converted into cultural centres, museums, hotels, theatres, or offices; the historic urban centres are made up, embellished, transformed into products of cultural and tourist consumption. There is a proliferation of parking lots, cafés, souvenir stores, folk entertainment shows everywhere" (Lipovetsky, 2006, p. 92).

In his text *The New Principles of Urbanism*, Ascher (2004, p. 72) expresses his concern over the lot of collective facilities and urban services in a society with increasingly varied and individualised customs and needs. How to make decisions and act for the good of the community in a changing and diversified society? How to design and make cities that function well and are attractive and fair when the prevailing realities encourage exclusion, segregation, an inside and an outside, a multiplicity of collective identities and strengthening of consumption and individualism?

7. Transformation of physical and symbolic representations in Metepec

Portal and Bodil (2007) as well as Duhau (2003) argue that the first discussions on the changing conceptualisations of what was traditionally understood as public space emerged in Mexico at the end of the second quarter of the twentieth century, specifically with the initial appearance of urban constructs which prominently blurred the distinction between the public and the private, that is to say private spaces which have a public use and public spaces designated for private use.

An example of the former case can be the range of interventions in historic centres or agricultural areas when building shopping malls and plazas, sports clubs, spaces with innovative forms of providing services, to mention just a few. The latter, on the other hand, can be exemplified by the recurring phenomenon of the privatisation of streets with the use of devices that limit and prevent the transit of all persons and vehicles that are "outsiders" from certain housing complexes, which breaks with the principle of what is public. This representation of the public sphere in contemporary societies tends to blur the notion of what was traditionally understood as public and makes it less clear in this new urban configuration.

This transformation of what is public can be associated with the new rhythms of production and consumption in postmodern societies, which not only find their expression in the aforementioned housing projects or the privatisation of streets by restricting traffic, but have gone much beyond them and now entail the emergence of a brand new culture based on consumption and hedonistic lifestyle – a culture which economic actors, as well as new residents of the municipality, have established as a new synergy and way of life.

In the case of the Municipality of Metepec, it is a trend that has altered the culture and identity of the majority of the native population who are imitating and adopting these lifestyles, a process manifested in the reproduction of native architectural styles in the construction of new homes, of course in a more minimalist manner, as well as the adoption of commercial plazas as new places of consumption and the appropriation of many local cultural and religious practices as part of a scenography falling in line with this synergy.

If the forms of consumption have changed, it is not difficult to deduce that so did identities, through the formation of new scenarios in which to reproduce

the new social representations constituted by a diversity of commercial and service offerings. In this way, the consciousness of some native inhabitants of Metepec has transformed: where the park, the garden, the plaza, the small square were previously conceived of as meeting points and socialisation spots, this function has now been installed in the new social representation: the mall and the commercial plaza have become the public space where people interact, socialise, and create links with others, in addition to satisfying their needs in terms of alimentation, leisure, and recreation.

Consumption establishes new social representations in the city not only in terms of morphology, but also in the social consciousness that shapes other ways of life, which are influenced by the principles of new identities and cultural transformations of the inhabitants of the city.

A relevant aspect that should be highlighted is that consumers consider these places as safe spaces for anyone using them. The same happens with the streets that are part of closed urban complexes; these are for the exclusive use of the residents of the estates. This new conception of the street breaks with the traditional notion that it is an asset that everyone can use and benefit from. In this new representation of the street, the inhabitants avoid risk and the probability of suffering from a physical or moral acts of violence, which are daily occurrences in traditional public spaces.

The aforementioned physical and symbolic representations exemplified by the economic actors and new residents of Metepec contrast with those that have traditionally prevailed in the municipality. For example, the new commercial and service spaces deviate from how the natives conceived of them. Such spaces were originally understood as the traditional market or the so-called *tianguis* or 'market on wheels'. They were social expressions that constituted a public space *par excellence* in which the locals not only acquired the merchandise for their daily lives, but also developed and consolidated diverse social relations and even social differentiation.

With the arrival of new residents to the Municipality of Metepec, all the social relations that had been developing organically in the so-called public spaces started to undergo transformations. The growth of the city brought with itself a shift in the meaning of public space in which the native inhabitants had grown up, that is, the street, parks and gardens, spaces that were more inclusive and less restrictive in their use, places perceived as meeting points for citizens to exchange ideas, thoughts, engage in cultural, artistic, sports activities, or just to coexist or converse.

This can be linked to what Portal and Bodil (2007) point out about the notion of the street. Beyond performing the function of transit, it is a place of neighbourly coexistence, a space for street commerce, providing fundamental access necessary to shape its surroundings and axes of transformation and urban development. The street, however, now begins to be the object of a new connotation, a space that is no longer public and that, depending on the type of development in an area, can be privatised to definitively exclude those who do

not belong to the newly erected estate. In this way, the local inhabitants have to internalise a new social representation of the space that had traditionally been understood as a public good.

Portal and Bodil (2007) argue that interest in the street is associated with the concept of history, of local identity which serves as the background for the new daily and commercial uses that are developed in such spaces, as well as citizen practices and forms of social interaction. This is why it is considered the 'classic' public space, although it also includes dynamics of transformation generated by the new conceptions of the public forged by citizen practices that give it meaning and generate forms of appropriation.

The plaza is characterised by offering an environment for meeting and recreation, unlike the street, which is defined more by its mobility function. Both spaces, however, are the site of commercial activity and linkage points in the urban structure. A characteristic feature of Metepec is the fact that most of the urban space is divided into closed estates that include gardens or small parks, the use of which is exclusive for those who live within the area; there is a profound absence of open squares, small plazas, avenues, public parks, and public gardens. The nature of such spaces in Metepec is somewhat contrary to how they are described by Aravena (2005).

"The most important part of collective life has always taken place in the squares, the place where the streets converged. From the Greek agora and the Roman forum, through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the present day, the square has always been the place of contact, dialogue, confrontation, recreation, rest, and sharing news. It has been the most participatory space in the city, the one with the richest community life, the most representative of man's social condition. Within their enormous variety, in different times and places, what plazas have in common is being a meeting place" (Aravena, 2005, p. 20).

The main square of the Municipality of Metepec only becomes relevant when it is the venue of civic events of national character or cultural and political activities carried out on the municipal scale. It is presently a place where the native inhabitants are fully anonymous, since during any festivities they are scattered among the vast crowds of participants. Additionally, the site is losing its importance as a space of coexistence and interaction to the commercial square, which has become the new meeting place of choice.

In the traditional understanding, public space is that which is not private (destined for the exclusive use of its inhabitants or occupants), and, according to Duhau and Giglia (2004), it is the physical medium that connects different private spaces and serves as a place where people meet, carry out activities such as walking, strolling, shopping; it is a space for meeting and participating in the social and communal life of a city. Public space belongs to the community and should not be subject to the influence of any private interest. It is used for leisure, recreation, meeting, and social gathering, so it should be kept in a state that allows its accessibility, comfort, and free exploration – elements

that, without having been specifically designed to fulfil this purpose, are present in 'pseudo-public spaces'.

It is also important to mention the emergence of new digital phenomena which are defined as virtual public spaces. Offering another way of interacting and forming networks and connections, they are a product of scientific and technological development as well as of new forms of consumption prevalent among the world's population.

Nonetheless, the way in which public space is conceived of in contemporary urban society has brought with itself new, non-traditional ways of life which reflect how individuals relate to productive, commercial, and consumption practices and which directly or indirectly affect transformations of the city. These processes implicitly involve cultural, economic, urban, political, and social phenomena which impose new visions and value codes on social and spatial relationships, and with them new forms of social representation that are adopted and reproduced as a new conditioning factor for interacting in the globalised world.

8. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that new social representations have been adopted in the Municipality of Metepec as a result of a number of interventions on the part of the private and public sector. With the development of housing, services, and commerce, new symbolic constructs have been instituted to define new social interactions; a new language loaded with images, meanings, and signifiers has been produced, modelling the thinking and behaviour of the inhabitants of the municipality.

The new way of shaping the city implies a redefinition of what was traditionally understood as public space, its function in the social fabric, and its reconfiguration towards new expressions of what is urban in the form of 'pseudo-public spaces'. An example are commercial plazas, which are taking over the role of traditional public spaces such as the street, the park, the garden, the square, the plaza as sites of coexistence, recreation, and even formation and strengthening of social ties and networks.

The shift in the meaning of public space and its new representation in the form of 'pseudo-public space' has induced new forms of consumption among the population. It has also strengthened the appropriation of space, which stems from the sense of security given to customers by physical barriers – it gives them a sense of safety from risk and potential violence, a feeling which they no longer experience in traditional public spaces.

The very economic development of Metepec has created urban and social conditions which have consolidated not only these forms of 'pseudo-public spaces' through the development of appropriate infrastructure and closed housing, but also the active participation of the population in digital public spaces, a form of social interaction which is steadily growing in popularity.

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ABSTRACT

Social representations, public space, and consumption in the city of Metepec, State of Mexico, Mexico

The article discusses changes in the social representations of the consumers of urban production in the Municipality of Metepec, Mexico. It focuses on streets and commercial plazas, public spaces in which the symbolic production of consumption takes place. In its methodology, the paper makes use of documentary techniques to identify the categories of analysis and the theoretical principles. In addition, it uses field techniques (mainly observation). The transformation in the meaning of public space and its new representation in 'pseudo-public space' has induced new forms of consumption among the population. It has also strengthened the appropriation of space due to the sense of security which consumers feel in these new 'pseudo-public' places – they perceive them as safe from risks and aggression, something that they no longer experience in traditional public spaces.

Keywords: social representations, public space, symbolic production of consumption