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Karen HINOJOSA HINOJOSA
Carlos ESTUARDO APARICIO MORENO

The missing public domain in public spaces: A gendered historical perspective on a Latin American case

This article searches for public domains in the history of public spaces in Monterrey from the perspective of their colloquial use by different social groups. Through documentary analysis, it reconstructs the transition from publicly owned public spaces to their privatised counterparts. The article expands the traditional somewhat idyllic narrative of public spaces and offers clues to how different social groups have used them. Public spaces have changed during four main periods. A centralised public space appeared during the colonial period (1596–1810), followed by socially segregated spaces between the beginning of the war for independence un-

til after the revolution (1810–1940). The dispersion of public space characterises the period of the metropolitan expansion of Monterrey (1940–1980). Finally, the privatisation of public spaces occurred at the turn of the millennium (1980–2015). Women, children and lower socioeconomic classes have had unequal access to public spaces in Latin America, thus precluding them from being considered public domains.

Keywords: public spaces, public domains, gender issues, Monterrey, social interaction

1 Introduction

Perhaps more than the way they are conceived, the way spaces are used and perceived reflects people's conception of society. Space, especially social space, is relational, the result of a myriad of connections that manifest a social order; a social product that everyone has a right to (Lefebvre, 1991). Some spaces are more hierarchical and others are more democratic, yet each of them contains expressions of class, gender and age produced by society at large. Public spaces are generally considered necessary and beneficial in urban contexts. They provide a place to encounter others and resolve differences. However, what exactly the term *public space* entails and comprises has been the subject of much confusion, which in turn complicates the definition of the characteristics of successful and beneficial public spaces. In light of the breadth of literature from diverse disciplines pertaining to the study of public spaces, some terms are defined to clarify what is meant in the context of this study.

There is a difference between public spheres, public spaces and public domains, although they are sometimes used as interchangeable terms in different disciplines. The public sphere is the "realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens" (Habermas et al., 1974: 49). Therefore, the public sphere or public realm is where discussion and debate between individuals occurs, most notably exemplified by the Greek agora. It is to be noted from Jürgen Habermas' definition, however, that the public sphere is for all citizens, which in the historical context of Greek societies excluded women, slaves and foreigners (Ghent Urban Studies Team, 2002; Powell, 2002; Low & Smith, 2013), all of whom remained confined to the private, domestic sphere or "oikos". Politically, these non-citizens were irrelevant; nonetheless, women did participate in a sort of "civic citizenship" (Parker, 1996: 80) in choruses, festivities and other religious rituals that gave them opportunities for social contact (Duby et al., 1994). The drastic demarcation between the public and private spheres has been diluted in modern times (Arendt, 1958); nonetheless, one must be careful when nostalgically idealising such examples that exclude the plurality of the human condition. In other words, the agora was indeed the place of debate of the "polis", a manifestation of its public sphere in a public place. That said, one cannot speak of public domains when more than half of the population is excluded from participating in them.

In contrast, public spaces have been understood in the realm of urban planning as publicly owned open spaces, including the streets, parks, squares and recreational areas where social interaction between different social groups is possible. Public spaces are "areas that are acknowledged, well known and open to all . . . that exhibit and embody the diversity in a city, stem-

ing from its accessibility to one and all" (Lim, 2014: 20). The diversity of uses and users in public spaces is perhaps its most important aspect, and one that favours safety and potential evolution (Borja & Muxí, 2000). However, precisely the extent of the accessibility, participation and mobility that different social groups truly have in public spaces has raised questions about the level of open access, commonality and shared responsibility these places have; that is, how "public" they actually are. Accessibility "is what guarantees the free circulation of persons and goods. It is also what allows the emergence of collective or social representations wherefrom images of the city are produced" (Tonnelat, 2010: 85).

Public domains extend the definition of public spaces to include enclosed spaces, such as libraries and community centres, also taking into account privately owned but publicly accessible spaces. Traditional public spaces do not include streets, but are limited to parks and squares, and in many ways these are the public spaces that urban planning agencies focus on when they speak of public space. In addition, whereas social interaction is theoretically possible in public spaces, public domains are "those places where an exchange between different social groups is possible and also occurs" (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2002: 11). In this sense, the emphasis in public domains is placed not on ownership in a legal sense, but in terms of a physical and psychological appropriation of their users and their social interactions.

Regarding urban gender issues in Latin America, they vary greatly, although, generally speaking, this group of countries has not been immune to the expected female submission to a patriarchal organisation of society (Femenías, 2009), which has reduced women's domain of public space. Although most of the Latin American countries became politically independent during the nineteenth century in line with the Age of Enlightenment's ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, the application of those liberal ideals did not apply to women, migrants, minority races and groups of perceived otherness.

Therefore, the distinction between different social groups, public spaces and public domains is central to the research questions that this article addresses: How have the public spaces of Monterrey changed over time? Within them, how have different social groups interacted? Moreover, because social interactions reproduce subjacent power structures, it is also meaningful to ask whether social interactions in public spaces have occurred under equal terms. The construction of this history has the objective of understanding whether all social groups are being served by the public spaces that have existed in the Monterrey metropolitan area in order to answer the most critical question: can these public spaces be described as public domains?



Figure 1: Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico (source: Karen Hinojosa Hinojosa).

Note: Peripheral municipalities to the metropolitan area are marked with cross-hatching.

Table 1: Population of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area by municipality, 1960–2015.

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
Apodaca	6,259	18,564	37,181	115,913	283,497	523,370	597,207
García	4,091	6,477	10,434	13,164	28,974	143,668	247,370
General Escobedo	1,824	10,515	37,756	98,147	233,457	357,937	425,148
Guadalupe	38,233	159,930	370,908	535,560	670,162	678,006	682,880
Juárez	3,166	5,656	13,490	28,014	66,497	256,970	333,481
Monterrey	601,085	858,107	1,090,009	1,069,238	1,110,997	1,135,550	1,109,171
San Nicolás	41,243	113,074	280,696	436,603	496,878	443,273	430,143
San Pedro Garza García	14,943	45,983	81,974	113,040	125,978	122,659	123,156
Santa Catarina	12,895	36,385	89,488	163,848	227,026	268,955	296,954

Source: National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Span. *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI, 2015).

The evolution of Monterrey’s public space is described through four distinct periods regarding the public domains within them. A centralised public space appeared during the colonial period (1596–1810), followed by socially segregated spaces from beginning of the war for independence until after the revolution (1810–1940). The dispersion of public space characterises the period of the metropolitan expansion of Monterrey (1940–1980). Finally, the privatisation of public spaces occurred at the turn of the millennium (1980–2015). This division does not comprise equally spaced time periods because the emphasis was placed on finding the transition between typologies of public spaces more than their general historical context. Each of these stages has characteristics not only regarding the availability of public spaces, but also their social activity, which allows them to be dominated by different social groups. Before the analysis of each of these historical periods, a brief general description of the geography and demography

of Monterrey is given to contextualise the metropolitan area studied.

1.1 Monterrey and its socio-demographic characteristics

Monterrey is the capital of Mexico’s north-eastern state of Nuevo León. Neighbouring the southern border of Texas, it is one of the most important industrial and economic centres of Latin America (see Figure 1). Located in a valley surrounded by mountains, the city was founded twice before its definitive establishment in 1596 and remained a small town until the mid-twentieth century. According to the most recent census, the metropolitan area of Monterrey has more than four million inhabitants, ranking it as the third-largest metropolitan area in Mexico and the second-largest in area (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, 2010). The city’s 6,680 km² geo-

graphical footprint (National Population Council, 2012) is bisected by the Santa Catarina River, a usually dry watercourse that nonetheless fills or overflows during periodic floods every ten or fifteen years.

Since 1950, Monterrey has been important in Mexico because of strong industrialisation, and it is well known as Mexico's economic capital. The Monterrey Metropolitan Area (MMA) consists of nine municipalities. In Table 1 shows the trends of population growth in the MMA by municipality. The data shows that, although the MMA has grown in population, the distribution of population is becoming increasingly more dispersed throughout the municipalities. In 1960 Monterrey had 83% of the population, whereas this share decreased to 26% by 2015.

2 Centralised public space: Monterrey during the colonial period (1596–1810)

The vast ceremonial spaces of the pre-Hispanic capitals left a considerable impression on the Spaniard conquerors, who had never seen urban public spaces of such proportions (Díaz del Castillo, 1939). This directly influenced *novo-Hispanic* urbanism, resulting in the ample church atriums of the sixteenth century, which were spaces not only of evangelisation but also of marketing and public conviviality. Even though Monterrey, like all of northern Mexico, did not have the direct legacy of the urban spaces of the Aztecs, the social representation of these ideas and images had already been assimilated by the founders of the city in 1596.

The Spanish Crown's policy of secrecy towards their conquered territories is consistent with the graphic knowledge about public space in Nuevo León and, subsequently, Monterrey during the first stages of the colony: practically non-existent. Nonetheless, through documents such as the Laws of the Indies, royal ordinances and correspondence of the time, it is possible to reconstruct a panorama of the earliest *novo-Hispanic* urbanism. The Royal Ordinances Concerning the Laying Out of New Towns state:

Upon arrival to the place where a population is to be established, which we ordain to be vacant lands, without Indians or naturals, or, failing to be so, with their consent, the plan is to be traced on the land, dividing it into squares, streets and plots, with string and ruler, beginning with the main square (Span. *plaza mayor*) and from there extending the roads to the gates and main roads, leaving open room so that, although the population grows greatly, the city can proceed in the same form The main square, from where the town must begin, must be made, being a Mediterranean location, in the middle

of the town. The square should be rectangular, at least one and a half times its width in length, because that way it is better for celebrations with horses and any other parties to be had (Pacheco, de Cárdenas, de Cárdenas y Espejo & Torres de Mendoza, 1867: 521).

In the case of Monterrey, as happened in many other cities, there was some adherence to the physical aspects of the ordinances, but less so to the social ones. The first map of Monterrey dates back to 1765; its creator, José de Urrutia, depicts a collection of agricultural plots and a few houses. The only marked buildings were the governor's house, the parish church and Saint Andrew's Convent. In 1791, Friar Cristobal Bellido y Fajardo of the aforementioned convent commissioned a map of the situation of Monterrey in the New Kingdom of León (see Figure 2). Public space figures prominently on this map (Flores Salazar & González Garza, 2002) in the main square facing the cathedral. At the time, Monterrey was very small, reported as measuring roughly 550 metres on its longest axis from east to west. It was still a city surrounded by streams, wooded areas and many natural open spaces.

The indigenous tribes in the north were mostly nomads, usually described as wild and ferocious. This was a time of intense and forceful assimilation of the native population, burdened by the influx of new settlers, including black slaves, mestizos and more than a thousand Tlaxcaltecs to help with the colonisation effort, a population much higher than the Spanish one at that time (Flores, 2009). In the case of other tribes throughout Mexico such as the Mayans, Huicholes and Totonacos, some rites demonstrate the social representation of the domestic role of women. For instance, at the birth of a girl, the ritualised burial of the umbilical cord near the hearth of the home symbolised her future as a good homemaker. Male babies' umbilical cords were buried outside, near a tree or a prosperous site, so that they would become successful providers (González Ortiz, 2005). Their places, inside and outside, respectively, were settled at birth. Instead of this model, the women of the Coahuiltecos, Borrados or Rayados that lived in northern Mexico had a sort of roaming domestic role, which consisted of gathering food and wood, cooking and taking care of children (Velázquez Morales, 1994). The idea of public and private spaces was gendered and not tied to a territory, but an activity.

In stark contrast to the romantic, almost naive image of peaceful conquest and settlement depicted in the royal ordinances, the natives fought continuously, practically up to their extermination. In fact, there was a very well defined system of legal, social and racial subcategories that emerged in Mexico through the process of racially-defined breeding, and all of the scrupulously labelled racial varieties (Span. *castas*) were considered inferior to the Spaniards. This distinct demarcation between

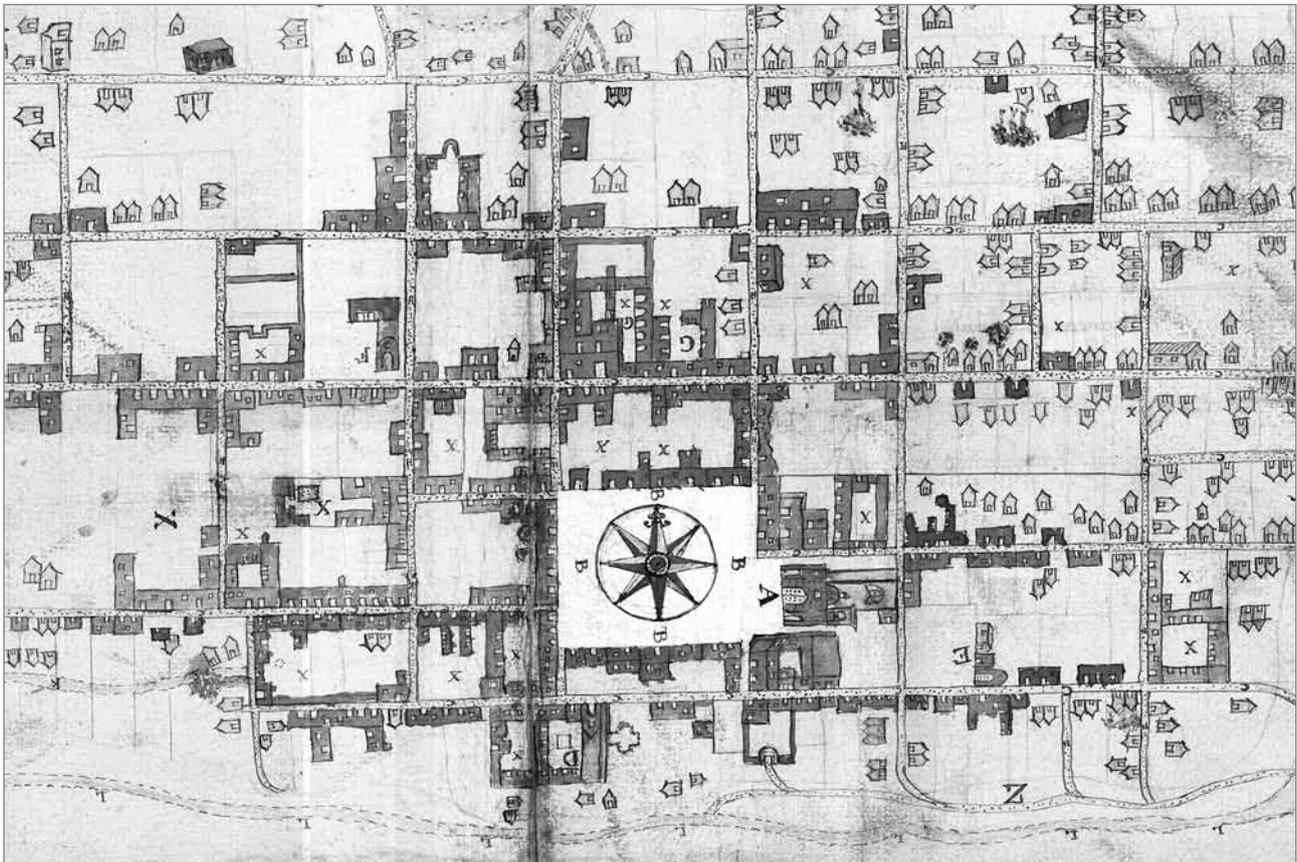


Figure 2: Main square in Monterrey (source: Bellido y Fajardo, 1791).

Note: The main square shown in white by the authors for clarity. Cropped from the original map, which has north downwards.

the conquerors and the conquered established the basis of the colonial regime (Cope, 1994). Little is known about the role of women of either Spanish or indigenous descent in the public spaces of the time. Although these spaces were supposed to serve both the colonisers and the indigenous population, the latter suffered systematic segregation that started from their places of settlement. Some authors have mentioned that the Tlaxcaltec Indians were segregated by the natural physical barrier of the Santa Catarina River (García, 2003; Aparicio, Ortega Rubí & Sandoval Hernández, 2011), which, although true, does not completely explain the social and cultural composition of the area south of the river. Perhaps it is more accurately explained by the mass arrival at a later date of Potosinian and Zacatecan labourers towards the middle of the nineteenth century. These migrants also settled in the same area, Long Hill Mountain (*Cerro de la Loma Larga*; Neira, 1990; Hernández & Escamilla, 2010).

José Sotero Noriega (1856) notes that Monterrey's main square was almost in the middle of the city with a growing population area south of the river. That square had an agreeable appearance, with orange trees planted at its four corners, providing shade to cut stone benches, making it one of the most beautiful

squares in Mexico. The author mentions the existence of other small squares, bounded by simple buildings with a joyful appearance, such as *Plaza del Comercio*, *Plaza del Roble*, *Plaza de la Purísima*, and *Plaza del Mercado*, previously known as *Plaza de la Carne*. The promenades of the population were generally conducted on the bridges north of the city because they were near plantations and tree-lined streets for the leisure of passersby.

Although the most notable public spaces of this time were the various squares previously mentioned, streets and pavements were also a very important place of colloquial social interaction. Fernando Rafael Casasús (2003) observes that the custom of the people of Monterrey sitting on the pavement in rocking chairs, wooden chairs or directly on the stoop goes back to this colonial period. There are references to this practice since the end of the seventeenth century, such as one in the municipal archives that states that Governor Juan Pedro Merino was "getting some fresh air" at the door of his house with a few friends when he received the news of an important accident (Montemayor, 1971: 407). This tradition is not exclusive to the people of Monterrey; it is also a Spanish custom for people to watch and comment on the events of the day, but

in Monterrey, because of the heat, it is done during the night to make it more comfortable (Casasús, 2003).

From this evidence, one can gather that the first type of public space in Monterrey, squares, were centrally located and relatively close to the housing in the city, yet the use of the space was certainly segregated and not as readily accessible to everyone. Nonetheless, during religious events, all social classes gathered in Zaragoza Square (Spa. *Plaza Zaragoza*) in front of the cathedral, and therefore in those instances they might be considered public domains, although they were chronologically limited to particular days or mere moments throughout the year.

3 Socially segregated spaces in Monterrey from war for independence until after the revolution (1810–1940)

On Saturday, 29 September 1810 Monterrey found out that the War of Independence had begun via a letter posted by Félix Calleja from San Luis Potosí (Casasús, 2003). Nuevo León's society was still trying to stop invasions by foreigners and indigenous attacks in order to secure a prosperous environment for economic and demographic expansion. Between 1810 and 1876 there were not many advances in science or technology because of intermittent wars and battles. Although the entire country was in turmoil during much of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Monterrey enjoyed a comparatively peaceful period, and even under occupation it tried to maintain peace to achieve economic stability. One of the most remarkable examples of this attitude occurred during the nineteenth century, in the battle against the American Army (1846–1847) led by General Zachary Taylor and the later American occupation. As a result of this war, Mexico lost half of the territory it had inherited from Spain, and Monterrey suddenly became a semi-frontier city with the United States and a key point in trade routes with the north and south.

During this mid-century period the population of Monterrey was divided between fighting the invaders and establishing good business relationships with them. Many businesses such as billiard rooms, restaurants and saloons were established in the city, most of them run by American businessmen (González Quiroga, 1997). These were private spaces of public use where the public sphere was discussed. The work relations that were established during this period were fundamental to the economic growth of Monterrey and the foundation of new businesses in later years. By 1858, Monterrey had a population of 13,534 (Malte-Brun, 1858).

There was relative peace between 1876 and 1910 with the national government of Porfirio Díaz and the state government of General Bernardo Reyes. Reyes took advantage of the peaceful period to boost industry, banking and commerce (Saldaña, 1981). One such industry that became a definitive turning point in Monterrey's development was the construction in 1900 of a foundry that began operating in this region, creating "an impressive network of related activities and making possible considerable growth in the local demand for both consumption goods and semi-manufactured items" (Beato & Sindico, 1983: 499).

During this time, social life in public spaces was highly segregated. The Spanish caste system was abolished, but its cultural repercussions were strongly felt and kept. Thus, in conjunction with segregation by social class was racial discrimination because having lighter skin was considered very desirable. Even among the upper classes, having darker colouring was a source of disdain and mockery, at the very least. This very visual aspect of one's social standing facilitated social discrimination.

A very telling social account from this time period is Elizabeth Visère McGary's book *An American Girl in Mexico*, in which she recounts her yearlong stay in Monterrey. The serenade, an activity conducted in the evenings in most Mexican squares, is described in her work as follows

The *plaza* [Main Square or Zaragoza Square] is a large square, beautiful with flowers and palm-trees. There was every kind of flower, even to magnolias in abundance, and fountains played among the trees. Every shady nook is filled with a bench, and from the bandstand in the centre, almost hidden amid the trees, the soft, sensuous music of stringed instruments delights the idlers there nearly every evening . . . All classes of people gather on the *plazas* in the evening. There are three walks laid out. The one on the edge is for the people of the higher class, and for *all* Americans; the next for those of the middle class, and on the inside walk through the "*peons*," or people of the lower classes (Visère McGary, 1904: 7).

The author goes on to comment on how remarkable it is that everyone knew their proper place, and, if anyone got confused or forgot their place, policemen ejected them from their position. People's conduct in the square during the serenade was also gendered because men and women walked in opposite directions unless married, in which case they were permitted to stroll arm in arm. Most women of the middle and upper classes stopped going to the square and other public spaces after marriage because it was believed that a married woman's place was in her home. In line with this, women were not legally considered citizens until 1953, when the constitution was reformed. Before that, they had the status of a minor that

depended on her father, a close male relative or a husband, if married (Galeana, 2015).

The culture of consumption that began with the American invasion and grew during the government of General Porfirio Díaz (from 1876 until the 1910 revolution) helped subvert some of the ideas of this female domesticity by opening up department stores as new public places for upper- and middle-class women. In Mexican society, the figure of the mother is glorified as the keeper of the home and, as such, mothers ventured out of the home and into their new role as consumers of household goods in the growing market economy. Thus, “department stores and urban shopping and entertainment districts became zones of consumption defined by the presence of women” (Bunker, 1997: 230).

The freedom of movement in public spaces that children had during this time was also important (see Figure 3). Before the constitution of 1917, child labour was common. In their engagement with work, in the case of the lower socioeconomic classes, or in their comings and goings between play and home, children were curious spectators and alert participants in life in public spaces. Families were large and children were everywhere: in the streets, on the squares, in markets and on thresholds (Guerrero Flores, 2007).

During this time perhaps the most socially integrated public spaces were markets because, although the upper classes did their shopping for clothing and fine items from shops and department stores, they still went to the popular markets for edibles. Circuses and other transient entertainment were also occasions for all social classes to interact, although with different accommodations according to one’s social standing. Those of high social standing could gather at the interior public space of the Monterrey Casino. In addition to the main square or Zaragoza Square, there were many other smaller squares such as *Plaza Hidalgo*, *Plaza de Cinco de Mayo*, *Plaza de Degollado*, *Plaza de la Purísima* (formerly *Plaza de la Llave*), *Plaza del colegio civil*, *Plaza Iturbide*, *Plaza Zuazua*, *Plaza Cuauhtémoc*, *Plaza de la Muralla*, *Plaza San Jacinto*, *Plaza Santa Isabel*, *Plaza Oaxaca* and *La Alameda*. In contrast, across the river the low-income San Luisito neighbourhood, which by now had received its name because of its demographic of migrants from San Luis Potosí, only had two squares: *Plaza Guadalupe* in front of the basilica and *Plaza Vereá*.

The panorama of Monterrey at that time is one of a hot land with a climate mitigated by the proximity to the mountains. The tramways through streets were cut now and again by attractive parks. The most beautiful one, *La Alameda*, was a wooded park that housed herds of deer that drank from its



Figure 3: Children posing by themselves in front of the State Health Council circa 1900 in Monterrey (source: General Archive Fund of Nuevo León, 1900).

swan-populated artificial lake. West of the city there stood an aristocratic neighbourhood called Obispado, with summer villas surrounded by centuries-old trees and flowering meadows crossed by small waterways (Bigot, 1910).

In 1910, Monterrey was Mexico’s fourth-largest city, with a population of 63,000, but it was in second place from an economic point of view, deserving the title of industrial capital of Mexico. More than 30,000 people died during the Mexican revolution of 1910–1920, but people from neighbouring towns in Nuevo León migrated to Monterrey during this unstable period for greater safety. This migration compensated for the loss of life, and so demographically the city remained somewhat stable during this time.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the most common leisure activities for the people of Monterrey were promenades around the city’s parks and squares, and day outings to nearby mountainous landscapes such as Huasteca, San Jerónimo, and El Diente. A popular urban gathering spot was the public swimming pool (*Alberca Monterrey*). For those that did not want to pay the small fee that the pool charged, in front of Lázaro Garza Ayala School there was *Charco de los Caballos* (literally, ‘horse puddle’), so named because it was where coachmen took their horses to be refreshed. Here is where people of the lower social classes gathered because it was free (Montemayor Hernández, 1971).

To sum up, Monterrey had several squares where people could meet their leisure needs, some, although certainly not all, with

fountains, benches and an appropriate landscape, but they were not readily available and accessible for everyone's use. Race, social standing, gender and age determined proper conduct in public spaces, especially under the government of Porfirio Díaz, when etiquette rules gained tremendous importance among the upper and middle classes (Bunker, 1997).

4 Dispersed public space and metropolitan expansion (1940–1980)

As Monterrey grew, the segregation of its inhabitants in their public spaces multiplied. In the sixth census carried out by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) in 1940, Nuevo León had a population of 541,147, of which 83% were native to the state. The foreign population was statistically insignificant, but was very important for the economic and social networks that were formed in the state.

Between 1940 and 1970, Mexico's domestic market-focused development strategy produced a sustained economic growth period, the "Mexican miracle". The business relationships with American enterprises that had blossomed during the previous decades slowed down due to high import tariffs and other government restrictions during this time. The focus was on developing energy, industry, communications and transportation infrastructure, and, as a direct consequence of this shift from the previous agricultural mode of production, cities like Monterrey grew rapidly.

This rapid expansion brought with it the first published idealisations of that previous public space. In an interesting and mostly unrealised project for land reclaimed from the Santa Catarina River in the 1950s, the first three and a half centuries of Monterrey's public spaces are portrayed as ideal; its squares, gardens and public arboretums accomplished their civic functions satisfactorily. Afterwards, lack of control and design combined with rapid urban growth is blamed for the lack of urban open spaces and public gardens, in proportion to the number of inhabitants and the hygiene demands of the city (Chamber of Transformation Industry of Nuevo León, 1960). Although the superblock proposal was only partially implemented in a condominium project, the call for an urban form with internal green space reserved exclusively for pedestrians was not received enthusiastically and did not succeed in shaping the urban typology of the city.

A landmark shift in public space use occurred in 1951 with the opening of the Campestre Golf Club in what was to become the elite municipality of San Pedro Garza García, part of the Monterrey metropolitan area. The social prestige that

prevailed at golf clubs attracted the upper classes to become members (Wray, 2002; Cerón Anaya, 2010), and their leisure time was no longer spent in the squares of the old city centre. Even though social interactions between the upper, middle and lower classes had always been hierarchical and codified, up to that point they had at least convened in some of the same public spaces. With the abandonment of publicly owned public spaces by the upper classes, contact between different socio-economical classes started weakening. Political ceremonies and national holidays were a few of the occasions at which people of all ages and incomes and both genders gathered in public spaces.

In the 1960s and 1970s, urbanisation increased dramatically, and the metropolitan area of Monterrey was created with nine municipalities: Monterrey, San Nicolás de los Garza, Guadalupe, San Pedro Garza García, Santa Catarina, García, General Escobedo, Apodaca and Juárez. The area of the metropolis was 2,456 km², of which 16% was urbanised and in which 80% of the population of the entire state of Nuevo León resided. This expansion was chaotic and lacked proper regulation and planning, which resulted in insufficient green public spaces for its population (Alanís, 2005). The integration of Monterrey into a regionally conurbated metropolitan area caused a dispersion of public spaces that were increasingly segregated into different income neighbourhoods, resulting in varying degrees of quality of infrastructure, many with insufficient green space.

In addition to the lack of adequate public spaces and urban vegetation, during the late 1970s metropolitan expansion resulted in an insufficient urban water supply. Public protests over water, held in public places by poor urban women, became another use of traditional public spaces and helped voice the urgent needs of public services in lower-income neighbourhoods. Gendered urban protests over public services in Monterrey fit into a wider Latin-American pattern, due to the higher participation of females in domestic work and the crucial role of water in such chores. Hundreds of low-income Monterrey residents, primarily women, assembled in the square in front of the Governor's Palace, bathing their children and washing dirty laundry in the public fountain (Bennett, 1995). This exemplified public spaces appropriated by distinctly different social groups, and also created a negative social representation of traditional public spaces as belonging to the lower classes among the middle and upper socio-economical levels.

The dispersion of public places in the metropolitan area of Monterrey not only had the consequence of increasing social distance between classes, but also between ages. In previous decades, when the city was compact, extended families were within a short distance of other family members. However, with the expansion of the urban fabric, the model changed to

nuclear family dwellings, often in the periphery of the city. As a result, social interaction with older family members became a weekend activity.

Overall, the second half of the twentieth century was a period of intense demographic and geographic expansion of the city. This growth resulted in an uneven distribution of public spaces, with low-income neighbourhoods often having less access to them. The abandonment of traditional public places in favour of private-public places like the Campestre Golf Club by the elite class was soon emulated by the middle class, in line with their options.

5 Privatisation of public space: Monterrey at the turn of the millennium (1980–2015)

By 1980, the government was well aware of the discrepancy between the availability of public places and the geographical extension of the city. Under these circumstances, the state government initiated a project to demolish forty hectares of the historical downtown area and to relocate 283 families and 310 businesses to build a great square, a civic space of enormous size to cement Monterrey's characterisation as the economic capital of Mexico. This huge public space, aptly named *Macropiazza*, the seventh-largest in the world, consists of various smaller squares and gardens, and is divided into two sections, one run by the municipal government and the other by the state. The administrative centres for these two government levels limit the square on its north-south axis (Internet 1, 2012). In spite of the immense cost of a project of this size, and perhaps precisely because of it, *Macropiazza's* success did not measure up to expectations. The vegetation that was selected has not thrived, and it does not offer enough shaded areas in this often hot city. Thirty years after its inauguration, the project has not aged well. It is not a local destination, especially for the middle and upper classes, and it is not a place for social integration and conviviality (Jiménez, 2014).

At any rate, the watershed moment in terms of use of public places in this decade came in 1984 with the opening of the first shopping mall in the metropolitan area, Galerías Monterrey. Its air-conditioned stores and restaurants lured those that could afford it (i.e., the middle classes) to its premises. The stroll in *La Alameda*, still a tradition at that time for middle-class and working families, was gradually exchanged for a visit to the mall. Thus the public places of the historical downtown that had previously been abandoned by the upper class were now also left by the middle class. In the context of street harassment and other gender violence that women are exposed to in

public spaces in Mexico and elsewhere (see Kearn, 2010), it is not surprising that those that are able to afford them turned to private gathering places, which offer an increase in perceived security, or opted to reduce their social outings (Ayala Gaytán & Chapa Cantú, 2012). Lower middle-class families, who could not easily afford such weekly spending, in turn migrated from *La Alameda* to the new *Macropiazza*, and *La Alameda* received a new population of indigenous migrants from other states, female domestic workers and male construction workers (Díaz Meléndez, 2008).

The bankruptcy in 1986 of one of the city's most iconic industrial centres, the Iron and Steel Foundry Company of Monterrey (*Compañía Fundidora de Hierro y Acero de Monterrey*), left a great brownfield in the heart of the city. Two years later, a trust was created to turn this space into an urban park. Along with *La Alameda* and the Santa Lucía Riverwalk, which connects it to *Macropiazza*, it is now one of the most important green spaces in Monterrey, perhaps the one that is most capable of integrating users from diverse social groups.

During the 1990s and 2000s, shopping malls, restaurants and commercial public places proliferated in the city, offering services in every municipality of the metropolitan area and for a wide spectrum of incomes. This may be because of the hot climate that prevails during the long summers, or because of the Americanised way of life that characterises some aspects of Monterrey's culture. Privately owned public spaces are extremely popular within this population, as testified by the fifty shopping malls currently in the city (Tomasini, 2015).

6 Conclusion

In the final analysis of the central question of this study, whether Monterrey's public spaces are public domains, given the history above, the answer would have to be "no" because different social groups have been excluded from them. Furthermore, as has been noted, there has been a transition in the public's choice from public spaces of public ownership to those of private ownership for their socialisation and recreation. Several authors have denounced this tendency for its disintegrating effects on the social fabric of cities and the emphasis it places on consumption and security. In fact, some consider privatised public space or public-private partnerships as malpractice in urban design and policies, or even as non-valid public spaces (Sorkin, 1992; Banerjee, 2001) typical of the neoliberal economic model. The abandonment of traditional public places is certainly worrisome because, by allowing public space to be privatised, there is a direct impact on the opportunities for political debate, and an increase in social exclusion (Carmona, 2014).

Conversely, the introduction of a gendered perspective into the study of public spaces has led others to study the characteristics that make them so popular for some demographics, such as women and teenagers. This matches what can be found in Monterrey, where shopping malls are so prevalent and popular. In the case of children, the incremental loss of independent mobility they have in traditional public spaces because of social representations of insecurity has also reinforced this preference for shopping malls and other privately owned public spaces, where their parents drop them off and they can roam freely within the safe confines of a controlled space. Admittedly, Monterrey's hot climate also bolsters the preference for air-conditioned spaces instead of open air squares and parks, which are often not designed to be climate responsive.

Although transdisciplinary studies from a gender perspective are still novel in the context of Mexican historiography, they have increasingly been incorporated into academic research in recent years. Therefore, new data are emerging that broaden the perspective of current dogmas. In the case of urban studies, there are still many subjects that could benefit from an analysis from this perspective. Women still undoubtedly play a secondary role in the public sphere, especially regarding power and decision-making. The gender roles that kept women out of public spaces are slowly becoming less rigid; nonetheless, their participation in public spaces does not occur on an equal footing (Varela Guinot, 2012). The same can be said of social groups of a perceived otherness that can be found in Monterrey: migrants, domestic workers, gays and lesbians, transsexuals, people of indigenous descent, the elderly and young children, whose role in local public spaces has been studied in a limited manner.

Despite the lack of public domains in public spaces, or perhaps because of it, in recent years civil associations have led a movement to implement targeted urbanism strategies to promote public space use by various social groups. This is happening not only in parks or squares, but also in the streets of the city – a widely available public space currently dominated almost completely by vehicles. It may be that these ephemeral public domains in the streets of Monterrey give voice to a population of pedestrians, women, children, minorities and civic-minded individuals with the desire to finally construct more inclusive permanent public spaces for their communities. In sum, public domains cannot be permanently found in the public spaces of the city, but ephemeral public domains offer glimpses of what the public spaces of the city have the potential to become.

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 Karen Hinojosa Hinojosa
 Autonomous University of Nuevo León, Faculty of Architecture,
 Department of Graduate Studies, Mexico
 E-mail: hinojosakaren@gmail.com

Carlos Estuardo Aparicio Moreno
 Autonomous University of Nuevo León, Faculty of Architecture,
 Department of Graduate Studies, Mexico
 E-mail: caparicio55@yahoo.com

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