Being-in-the-city: higher education students' representations of everyday spaces and places

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Abstract

Social groups lead to the emergence of different subjective territorialities, based on heterogeneous territorial representations and alternative ways of enjoying and relating in these multi-nodal spaces. The activities evolve side by side with people's aspirations in a context of the vastness of possible universes, mediated by technology networks and social structures. As a result the dynamics in the constructed space, and the activities, both associate with new forms of ownership and social urban living, which are expressed in various forms of territorial representation. Here, the forms of symbolic representation of the everyday spaces of higher education students assume particular relevance, since they function as indicative references of their origins, affinities and sociabilities, in a testimony to matrixes of the social and symbolic relations that are relevant to and indicative of their daily participation. In this paper, we will present and discuss some symbolic representations of space as disclosed by a group of students from a higher education institution in Porto, Portugal. The aim is to present a theoretical and methodological framework of social representations that explains the routes, social networks, spaces of belonging and sociability that are key indicators of youth reinterpretation and enhancers of civic participation strategies of the students in the city and the reference space.

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1. A framework

> Today, I again opened the window where I always lean, and wrote: here is the aquatic immobility of my country, the oceanic abyss with a smell of cities to dream about. I am filled with the will to remain here, forever, at the window, or to go with the tides and never come back...
>
> Al Berto

Alongside 'Al Berto's tides', there is a will for freedom, a will of choice, a will of change. At least since Lefebvre the debate on the right to the city has been part of the discussions about urban living and routines of everyday urban life. These questions have been somewhat disregarded, however, as they appear to be embedded in today's urban lifestyles. We believe that despite the choice in terms of uses of the city, an old question arises; that of the modern uses of the city by university students: "In his study on Paris and the Parisian Region, Chombart de Lauwe notes that "an urban quarter is not determined only by geographic and economic factors, but by the representation that its inhabitants and those of other quarters have of it"; and he presents in the same work — to show "the narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives... geographically a setting whose radius is extremely small" — the planning of all the journeys made in a year by a female student from the 16th arrondissement: these journeys form a very small triangle, without durations, whose three apexes are the École des Sciences Politiques, the residence of the young woman, and that of her piano teacher. There is no doubt that such diagrams, examples of a modern poetry capable of inciting sharp affective reaction — in this case indignation that it's possible to live that way — or even Burgess's theory about Chicago, of the distribution of social activities in defined concentric belts, will help to advance *dérive*[5]" (Débord in McDonough, 2009: 78-79).

Western societies today, their cities and urban spaces, are strongly shaped by consumption. From the visual stimuli to the apparatus, simulacrums (Baudrillard, 2007) and specific places, urban space is mutated by the presence of consumption appeals and 'institutions'. The urban space is therefore transformed both by the presence of visual elements that become part of the urban landscape and by a set of recreational and commercial spaces which, through fashion and novelty, inscribe new routes and create spaces as spaces where to be in, as landmarks of identity. Metropolises evolve, too, amplifying and restructuring themselves, "forming a new city, more broad, heterogeneous and multi-polarized" (Marques & Silva, 2010:2).

But the world is still "a *particular* world, known in a particular way that makes it possible to achieve life-projects. The important point here is that this is based upon the pre-personal project of the body as being-in-the-world. That is, the initial 'world' through which we come to self-

[5] Débord explains *dérive* as 'a technique of swift passage through varied environments. The concept of *dérive* is inextricably linked with the recognition of effects of a psycho-geographic nature, and with the assertion of a ludic-constructive behavior, which contrasts it on all points with classical ideas of the journey and the stroll' (In McDonough, 2009: 78), that enables the breach with the (symbolic) barriers that accommodate the use of the city and confine the world of possibilities by routinizing behaviors and so diminishing knowledge of the urban space.

knowledge is one of taken-for-granted, non-cognitive attitudes to objects and other persons, manifest in forms of behaviour that 'teach', purely practically, the grounds of an affective-attitude; that operates like an attitude to existence and which is the body's 'style' of being." (Charlesworth, 1998: 17). Therefore, the representations that we are going to look at are in this confluence, in the subjective representational game crucially confronted by the instances of metropolitan consumption that structure and characterize ways of life.

According to Foucault (2007), a history of spaces is a history of power. This assertion is an almost perfect summary of the idea that each society creates its spaces (Lefebvre, 1968-1972), and produces the human social character it needs (Fromm, 1983); spaces and character that are essential to the production and reproduction of the main principles of social organization. In the context of advanced capitalism, the structuring of urban space tends to interact with the main traces of the dominant accumulation process, easing the consolidation and deepening of the social relations that characterize it (Harvey, 2000). Space is thus invested with new points of view that contradict its immutable and synchronous views. In brief, space comes to life via the attitudes taken to it as, as Arendt said, "the function of objects is to stabilize human life and (...) its objectivity depends on the fact that individuals, in spite of their unstable nature, can recover their identity through their relations with the same chair, the same table" (Arendt, 1983: 188).

Like Simon Charlesworth we understand that if we are to "appreciate the impact of the barely perceived minutiae of an environment that exists as an inexpressibly complex mixture of architecturally given space; of inherited historical sense; of social practices; of behaviors and institutions; of the space that particular persons live through as body-subjects, then we need to understand the relation of persons to their environment as something deeper than the relation of subject and object" (Charlesworth, 2000: 16). The meanings that individuals that inhabit space see in it are paramount to clarifying their social environments and the relation of the various social agents with political and economic structures.

Space is thus more than an inert factor, as pointed out above. It not only comes to life but also influences life because its buildings, routes and organization serve specific purposes, helping to determine the possibilities of urban living. By asking ISCET students to draw their maps of the city based on where they go, we like show the district of the metropolis and its specification in terms of both the space itself and its definition based on its use.

2. A methodological and analytical outline

This article is part of an on-going project on 'Space and Time in Contemporary Territory' that CEGOT and ISFLUP have been developing since January 2011. The research has involved several *démarches*, in particular two preliminary approaches: one focused on FLUP's undergraduate students of geography; the second focused on ISCET[6] students. This paper concentrates on the second. The primary objective is to understand the socio-territorial lifestyles of ISCET students, with particular emphasis on the city of Porto and its metropolitan area. We consider the social actors that share the condition of being ISCET students from Porto or its environs (Figure 1). Given that Higher Education is reflected on a new territorial insertion in terms of the everyday experience of the city, the focus on this particular group relates to the dynamics of *learning the city* and a re-learning *the metropolitan space* to reveal new spaces and different forms of relationship.

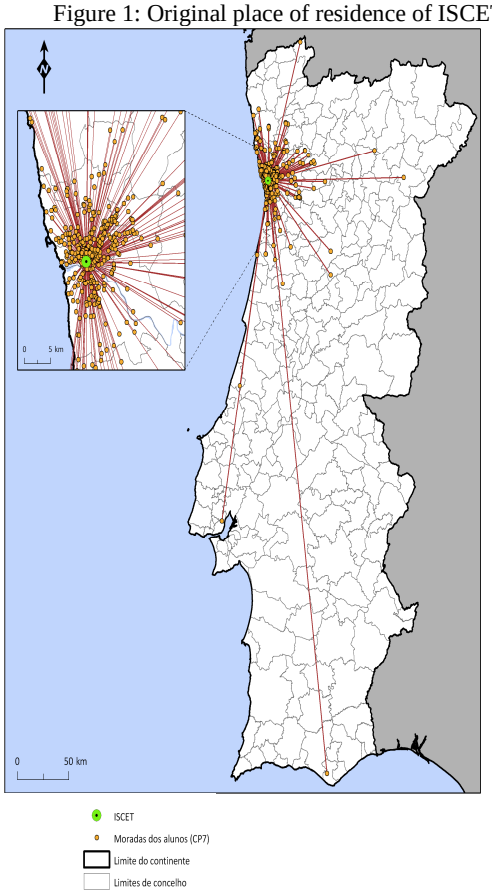
The work described here concerns the analysis and interpretation of the results of the questionnaire administered to 177 of ISCET's 583 students. The questionnaire was applied indirectly on May 2011, and this provided basis for the graphical and cartographical synthesis, as well as the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the mental maps produced by the 177 students who answered the questionnaire.

The interest in ISCET students is related with the importance that the university student segment has attained in Portuguese society in the last few years. For most of the twentieth century, education in Portugal was relatively underdeveloped. In the 1960s educational levels were very low - particularly in higher education - (Almeida 1994; Barreto, 1996). Since the Democratic Revolution of 1974 and Portugal's membership of the European Economic Community in 1986 government investment in education has increased significantly, especially in post-secondary and higher education. Between then and now we have seen access to higher education broaden considerably and ISCET is an example of this. The proliferation of the new information technologies, the development of both society and the economy of knowledge, and the increasing challenges brought by globalization acted together to change the courses offered, underpinned by a commitment that goes beyond the classic dichotomy between humanities and sciences. This triggered the proliferation of areas of knowledge of a more practical nature that

[6] ISCET is a polytechnic institution focused on the areas of Human Resources Management, Marketing and Advertising, Social and Work Psychology, International Trade Relations, Social Service, Tourism and International Trade, Social Work and Socio-educational intervention, and Tourism and Business Development.

bring about the merging of the scientific and technological facets. It is in this context that ISCET's training courses are situated.

Figure 1: Original place of residence of ISCET students

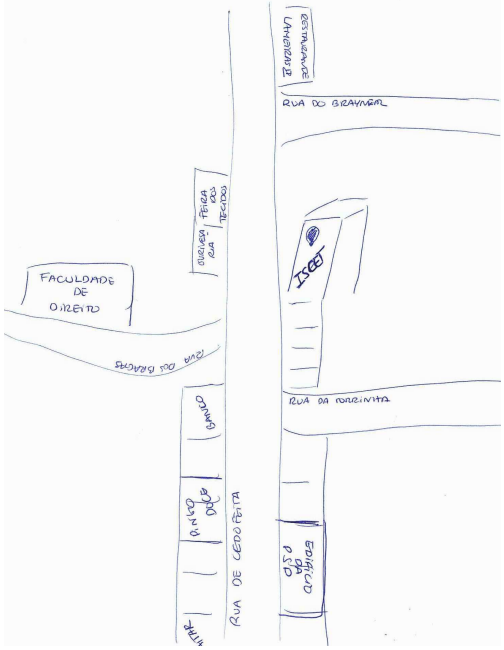


Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

A questionnaire was applied to ISCET students with a view to obtaining a preliminary explanation and understanding of the representations of space and time in the territories of today. This tool was structured around a set of questions that lead to another set of variables which concern: details of the individual and their family (age, sex, level of education, place of residence, place of birth, place of work/study, work status, professional circumstances...); elements related to the description of the week and week-end daily life (time occupation, means of transport, purposes of travel, duration and times of travel, sociability relations inherent to travel and degree of satisfaction regarding everyday life); sketch of a mental map of the area around the house and school, and also of the metropolitan and regional surroundings; the

frequency of use of semi-public places of sociability such as shopping centers, pubs/clubs/coffee shops, plazas, streets, gardens and green parks, leisure facilities (cinemas, theatres, and other sports, cultural or leisure amenities); relational practices with respect to the knowledge society and virtual reality (internet connection at home and place of usual access to the internet); finally, the representations of the quality of life of the residents in the proximity of the home and metropolitan region, were also matters that interested us.

Figure 2: Example of a space representation of ISCET's location



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

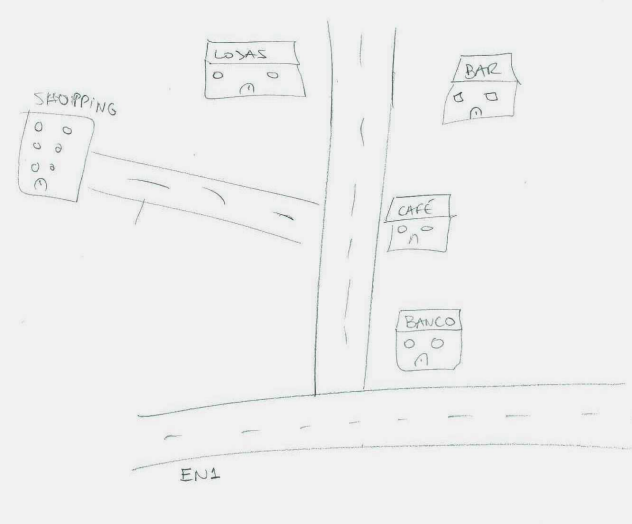
The analytical and methodological focus of this article concerns the mental maps made by ISCET students in relation to the importance of social representations of space (Figure 2). This was because there is a strong relation between everyday life and its spatial translation. We can agree with Boaventura de Sousa Santos that, "our own times and temporalities will be progressively more spatial" (Santos, 1988: 140). The challenge of the research is to understand what in the social relations of these students stems from the fact that they occur in specific spaces and, above all, what are the students' social representations of the same spaces. The presentation that follows thus focuses on a set of graphic and cartographic diagrams drawn by the students, plus their qualitative and quantitative analysis.

3. A multi-representational living

The construction of a city implies the production of a symbolic lexicon that characterizes and identifies the image framework and the reference values of its inhabitants. We intend to show how understanding the metropolization process can serve to consolidate a renewed urban image and identity. According to Massimo Cacciari, in Greek, "*polis* immediately refers to a strong idea of rootedness" (Cacciari, 2009: 9), with this, furthermore, being the traditional use of this word among the philosophical roots of Western thought, as has been shown by a broad range of thinkers (Habermas, 1987). It is worth recalling some of François Ascher's considerations here: "To consider a city complex and not only complicated" presupposes "that it functions taking as its base multiple logics and rationalities that may contradict one another; that it forms an open system; that its balances are unstable; that slight variations may engender considerable changes; that evolutions are generally irreversible" (Ascher, 1998: 141). Therefore we stand by the idea that, far from breaking down, the great cities recompose and lead to the emergence of new centralities, new mobilities, new public spaces, new forms of sociability, new forms of citizenship, new forms of experiencing and representing the polis, consequently representing the non-urban spaces as empty, almost illegitimate (Augé, 1998; Ascher, 1998).

This reconstruction of the regional and metropolitan identities shows us that urban symbolism is a reference point that structures and conditions social activities in various ways, engaging strongly with the processes that define the social actors' identities. The practices and social activities and the constant interactions developed in this framework contribute to producing and reproducing, structuring and re-restructuring the urban form and symbolism: "the emergence of space is visible in all of the social sciences and in philosophy itself. Geography, the science of space *par excellence*, really bears witness to this intellectual and cultural transformation. In the 1970s Geography tended to reduce space to the social relations occurring within it and so almost lost its own scientific space among the other social sciences, especially sociology and economics, but in the last few years it has recovered the spatial dimension to examine its specific efficacy for social relations. In other words, now it is about examining what in social relations specifically results from the fact that these occur in space" (Santos, 1988: 140).

Figure 3: Representational configuration of urban space within a suspended symbolic order



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

Henri Lefebvre's distinction acquires an undeniable importance here. Space is conceived by those who dictate the canons and the form of a city; it is equivalent to the representations of space by scientists, planners and urban developers. But it is also 'space experienced' by those who move inside it on a daily basis, in terms of their views of it, the images and symbols that accompany it, thus being *par excellence* the space of the inhabitants. This 'experienced space' can be transformed into 'perceived space', because it corresponds to the spatial practices that enable the continuity and a relative reproduction inside concrete social formations. Raymond Ledrut (1971) saw space as the locus of a system of social interactions, but Henri Lefebvre (1981) goes further by considering social space as a construction that implies the updating of social and political processes, denying the neutrality of space, as mentioned before, and taking it as both a process and a result, as a framework and as a structuring and re-structuring factor of social relations.

Given our theoretical references, we have to assume the particular importance of the Bourdieusian analysis that we feel is the most complete interpretation and, at the same time, more operative with respect to the view of the social space and its primordial importance in the social representation processes that we are analyzing. Pierre Bourdieu conceives the relation between physical space and the social productions of sense that emerge in it in the following way: "the reified social space (...) appears in the distribution in the physical space of different types of goods and services and also individual agents and groups physically located and endowed with the ability to appropriate these goods and services, more or less important

(according to their capital and the physical distance of these goods, which also depends on their capital)". Here, the notion of social space as a social topology focused on the relations between individuals and society, of an immaterial nature but understood collectively, acquires great importance (Bourdieu, 1989; 2006; Guerra, 2003).

Hence, we stand for a conception of space as relational, i.e., the positions occupied inside it by the social agents are only defined by comparison and interaction, as Bourdieu affirms, "the notion of space contains, in itself, the principle of a relational understanding of the social world. It affirms that every 'reality' it designates resides in the mutual exteriority of its composite elements"; therefore, "Apparent, directly visible beings, whether individuals or groups, exist and subsist in and through difference; that is, as they occupy relative positions in a space of relations which, although invisible and always difficult to show empirically, is the most real reality (the *ens realissimum*, as scholasticism would say) and the real principle of the behavior of individuals and groups" (Bourdieu, 1997: 31). This conception also indicates an urban thought of citizenship, which enables civil society to express itself and helps the authorities to pinpoint regeneration problems and strategies - even if these strategies are expressed symbolically, because symbols and icons, too, need to be reinvented to follow the metropolization of people's spirit.

To maximize the role of historical conscience as Walter Benjamin (1997) understands it, therefore, the cycle of production-appropriation must be symbiotic and serve the notion of change and not its suppression. Thus, as Benjamin notes, "even those who are distracted can create habits", the route to reflection about the capacity of the city to mobilize is open - both in terms of cultural habits and in recognition of the leisure dimension in the contemporary context - new levels of demand and a new urbanity in its 'publics': "for the private person, living space becomes, for the first time, antithetical to the place of work. The form is constituted by the interior; the office is its complement. The private person who squares his account with reality in his office demands that the interior be maintained in his illusions" (Benjamin, 1997: 73).

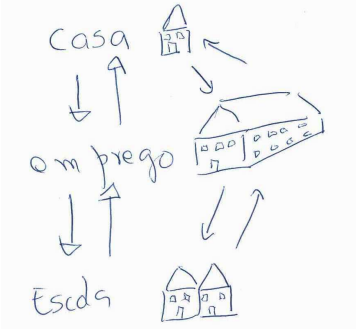
The islands of visibility or the invisibilities in the metropolitan territory and the challenges that are currently faced by public spaces face are due a mention. As Michel de Certeau (1990) says, the absence and the extermination of names, and specifically the names between the names, makes the city a suspended symbolic order (Figure 3). And this is how a predisposition to the possibility of the invisible is created. What is not retained by way of any mechanism that

ensures the retention of attention, of endeavor and investment, via imaginability, as Lynch (1981) said, is not seen and contributes to a fragmentation of the overall image of the city.

4. An overview of the metropolis

The growing imperatives of mobility accentuate the increasing quantitative and qualitative extension of the city's limits. Flows and exchanges have caused the city to transfer its boundaries, and the theoretical understanding of the interaction between the framework and the built form is fundamental to the consideration of both the emerging cities and urban areas undergoing continuous development, making their routes and buildings favored vehicles for implanting this physical and symbolic continuity. In fact one of the most relevant representations of the ISCET students is centered on drawing the space, emphasizing an experience of the city based on specific places connected through means of transportation that have specific, well established routes, which results in an almost premeditated and mediated use of the space. It can thus be seen that metropolization essentially increases the possibility of longer journeys in a shorter time. The drawing in Figure 4 clearly shows a representation of the city according to its functionality, marked by the utility assigned to the spaces. Here the city is a symbolic space without scale, a cluster of places without belonging in any specific territorial location, showing that this population has mobility. According to Bauman (1999), the great social cleavage that prevails in this era of globalization comes from mobility. The social space can be divided in two, a deterritorialized elite that benefits from the technology that enables them to move independently from where they are, and a dominated group that is confined to where they live and the local neighbourhood.

Figure 4: Representational configuration of urban space under the influence of mobility



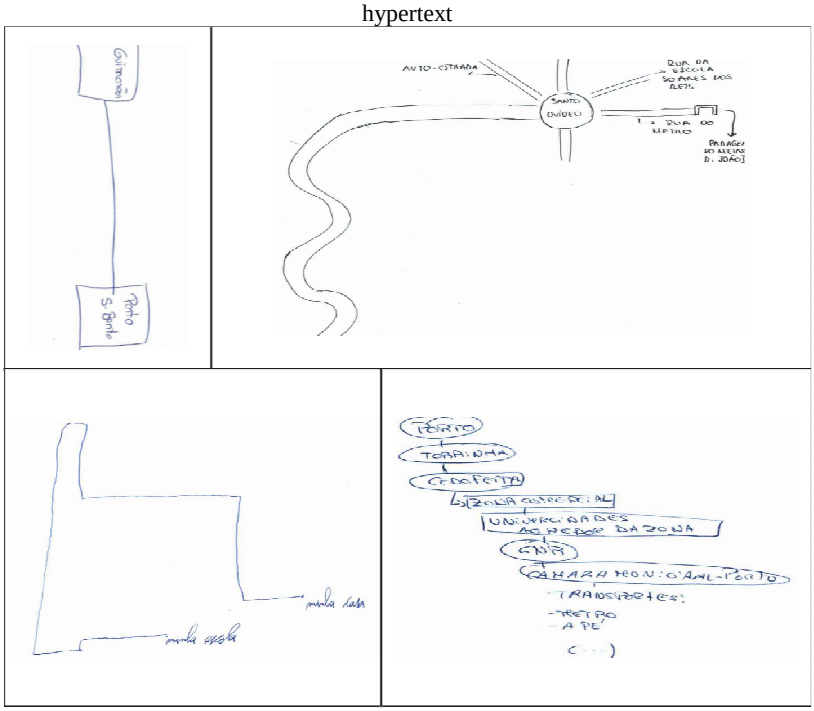
Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

The complexity of space is reduced, blurring its plurality and material reality, emphasizing destinations over routes. The large majority of ISCET's students' journeys (home-school, home-work or home-leisure places) are made by private or public motorized transport, thereby establishing not only a diverse perception of the urban environment but a tunnel effect, too[7] (Figure 5): between the home, school and/or work[8]. ISCET's students do not see the urban space that surrounds them when they move between the islands of their main origins and destinations. This image produces fragmentation and segregation by worsening a representational pattern of social differences in the wider urban space, causing the emergence of single-purpose, scattered spaces of opposition, avoidance, in line with the edge cities (Garreau, 1992).

[7] Hillier situates the phenomenon that he calls of the pure origin-destination system in the context of the loss of energy and collateral effects of urban movement caused by moving from a dense urban system to a dispersed and fragmented one: 'If we start moving in an urban system that used to be dense and nucleated and that is now disperse and fragmented, it is obvious that journey times will (...) increase. It is less obvious, but equally true, that the by-product effect will also diminish. With the increase in dispersion, it is less likely that the connected places will benefit from the by-product of movement. Hence, as the dispersion increases, the system of movement becomes more a pure system of origin-destination. Instead of a journey with the goal of accomplishing a series of purposes, more trips, each with the goal of accomplishing fewer purposes, must occur with the goal of accomplishing the same purposes. These are the basic reasons why people travel further in the country, and why most of these extra journeys are done by private car'. (Hillier, 1996: 178).

[8] We take the tunnel effect to be the lack of attention people give to urban surroundings when travelling in a mechanical means of transportation. This is what causes spatial invisibility.

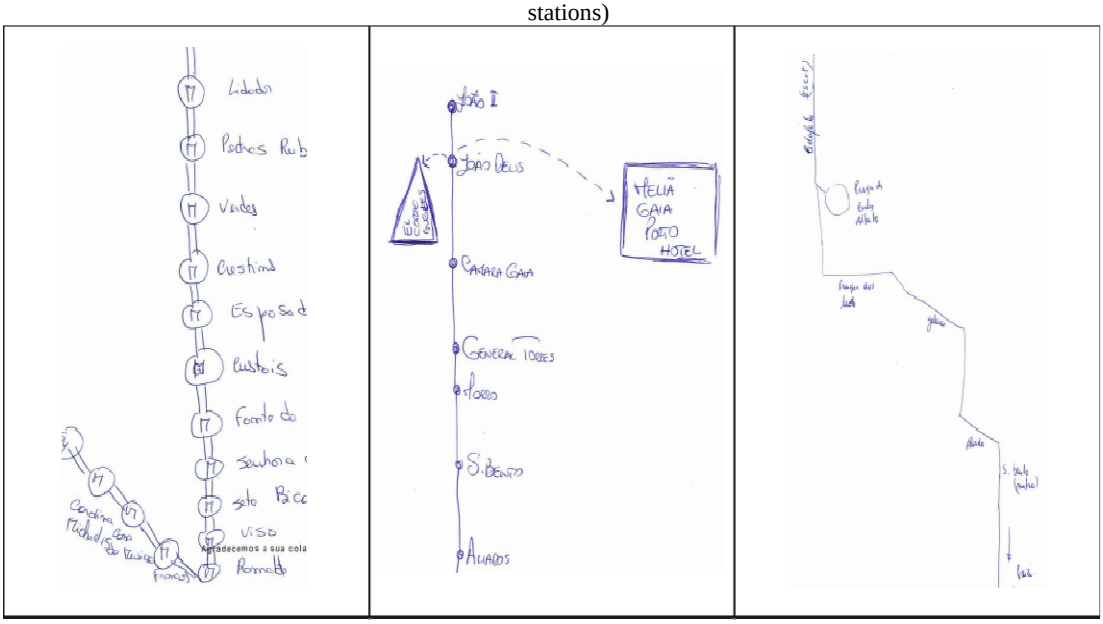
Figure 5: The representations of metropolitan living reflecting mobility: a route (tunnel effect), a circuit, or a hypertext



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

The movement, the flow of people and goods around the urban fabric, is mentioned by several authors as being key to the comprehension of the urban shape and of the relations that occur in it. Some ISCET students represent the complexity of metropolitan space with a straight line between home and the destination or with fairly complex circuits (Figures 4 and 5). But, individuals also move, really or virtually, in different social universes constructing a hypertext, since individuals are simultaneously a part of several texts (or layers) and move instantaneously from one to another. Some networks are hierarchical, other are fragmented. Social actors thus move in all directions, for different reasons and depending on the hour and day. Mobility has become a key aspect of urban living and is explained by the enhancement of territorial representations structured by networks and means of transportation or motorway junctions (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 6: The importance of mobility reinforces the centrality of some nodes (tube stations, bus stops or train stations)



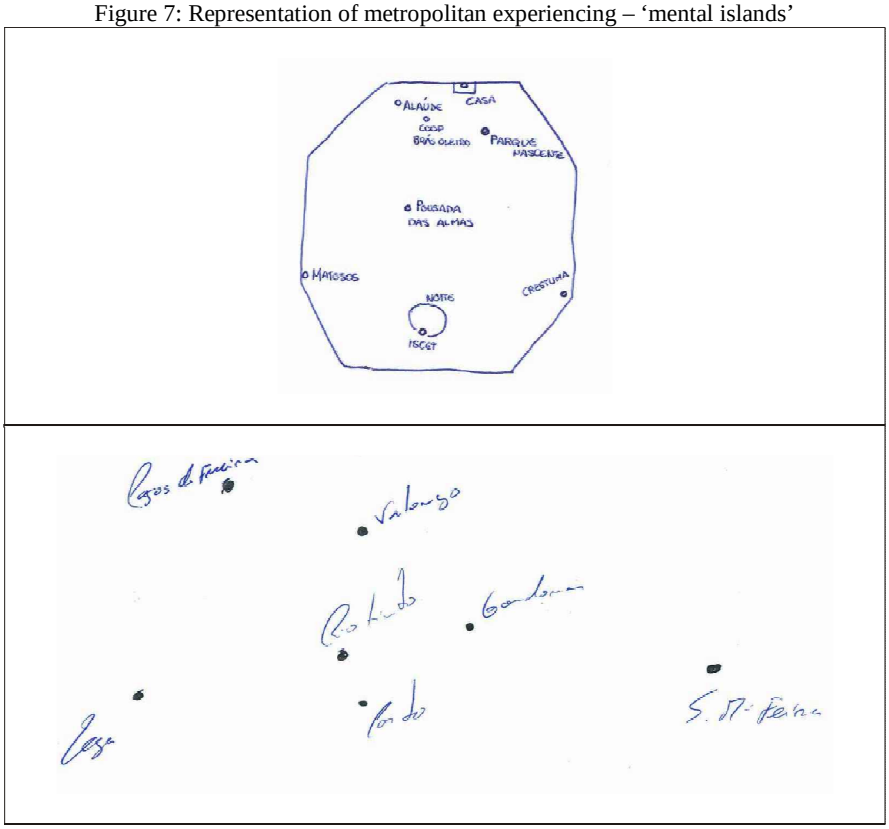
Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

The metropolis' construction processes appear to have given rise to urbanizations that feed off their own symbology and identity which, in terms of a fairly obvious semiological reading, tend to be created as apparently autonomous urban units. And this is how the 'mental islands' reproduce themselves, sometimes helping and sometimes hindering the reading of the complex city. Through this interpretation the ISCET students contribute to the diffusion of the urban islands (Figure 7), inside an increasingly discontinuous city. The social actors that inhabit these urban islands are metaphorical castaways, stranded in a world where mobility is a cardinal virtue.

We in fact argue that the absence of a strategy with respect to this phenomenon hinders the progress of identity mechanisms to consolidate an image for the positioning of the metropolis in relation to itself and the exterior. This is equivalent to the emergence of increasingly more segregative tendencies in the structuring of urban space that lead to the existence of a spatially divided city that lacks social cohesion. Several authors have compared this fragmentation with the emergence of an 'archipelago society' (Viard, 1994), a kind of metaphor for a space marked by a discontinuous order and even isolated from the others, contradicting its fundamental principles, i.e. place of exchange, of meetings, of multiple passages. This fragmentation of territory itself leads to ideological and symbolic fragmentation. And, if we speak of

archipelagos where one is, we speak of archipelagos where one thinks and acts. The fragmentation of space leads to a fragmentation of action by diminishing a broader understanding of what lies round about, showing the vehemence of the *effet de lieu* (Bourdieu, 1999).

Figure 7: Representation of metropolitan experiencing – 'mental islands'



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

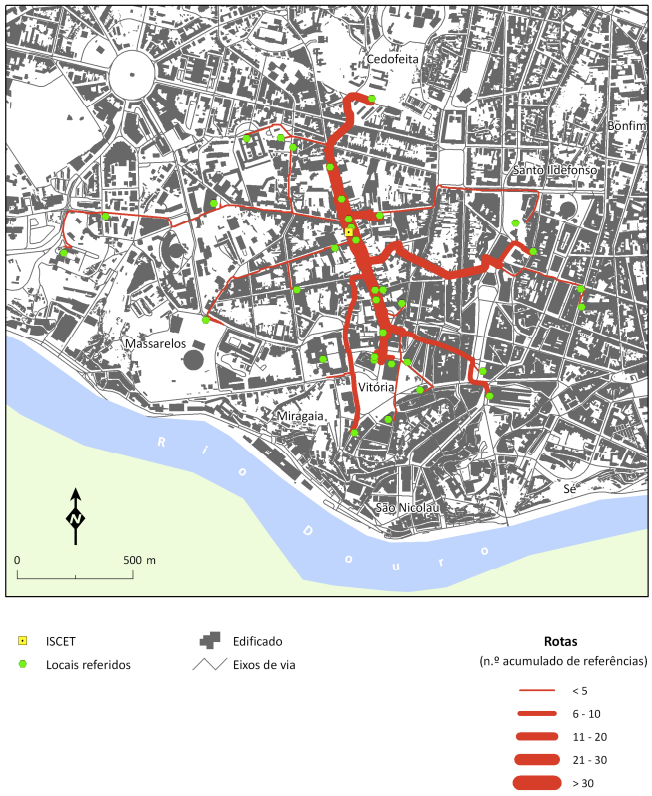
5. A look inside the metropolis

We shall now look at the social spatial representations for which the school (ISCET on our case) is their main anchor. We will show that space has become an everyday life compass whose experiences at micro scale may glide into understanding tendencies at macro scale. In the previous point we emphasized the spatial representations based on an overview of the metropolis, fragmented and defined by the combination of its fragments, its islands, now, we will put each of these spaces under the lens, examining what is at eye level. So we are moving from an aerial to a surface view, about a view of the space from the space itself. This is

important since we believe that contemplating the school of today also, maybe chiefly, implies thinking about its exterior, because the university space did not used to be democratized and consumption places did not have the relevance that they have today. With the impact of the consumer society on the lives of individuals, mainly of youths, school competes with other places as structuring elements of youth identity. Consumption spaces, shopping centers and ludic and recreational places, are today central elements in youth sociabilities and socialization opportunities.

We shall start by looking at the 'pedestrian rhetoric' coined by Certeau (1990). This means that we are in streets made by persons who restore them with meanings (of the town, the quarter, the street itself) able to bestow specificities on the individuals that share in them. Walking (the 'pedestrian rhetoric') is a form of appropriation, more than a simple passage, and it is this appropriation that resizes the impact of the city on the citizen's own identity. Certeau concludes, "the pedestrian movements form one of these 'real systems' whose existence, in fact, makes the city a reality. They are not localized, yet they spatialize" (Idem: 145). In relation to this, we represent the places and spaces of everyday appropriation of ISCET's students (Figure 8). The scale of urban experience of ISCET's surroundings is spatially limited with Rua de Cedofeita as its spine, with only a few branches, restricted to few references. There is thus a structured student daily life (with intense gravitation) around the place of study, perhaps facilitated by its symbolic, economic, and ludic centrality

Figure 8: Spaces of more intense experience (streets and places) in the vicinity of ISCET

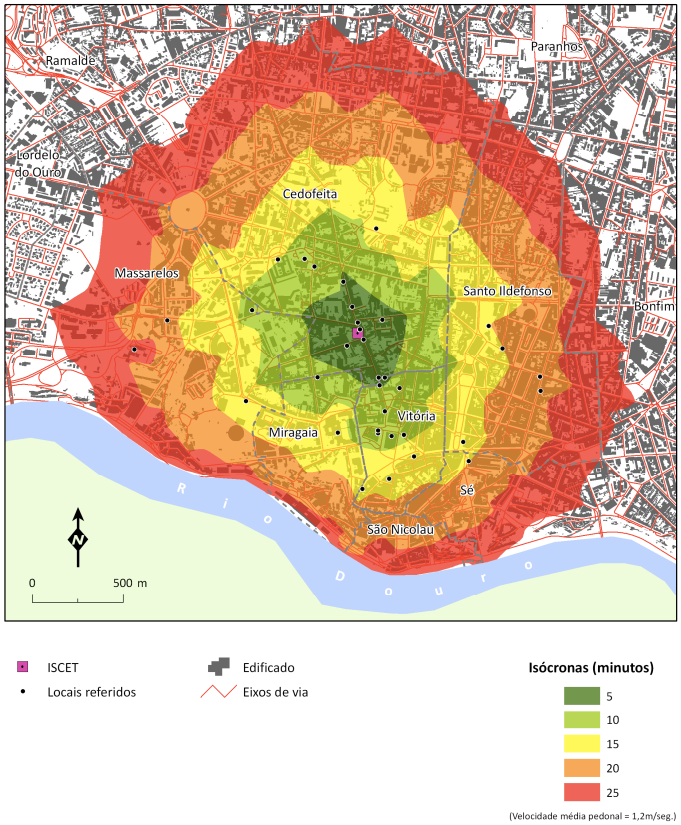


Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

If we analyze the places mentioned by the respondents and their intensity of experience, we can still corroborate this information (Figure 9), as it is in the vicinity of ISCET that the main references are made, showing a merging of the school space and spaces of elective affinity (Urry, 2002). Here we can address the relevance of the particular condition of students, considering their greater predisposition to an intense and tutelary spatial linkage due to the existence of temporal, cultural and social conditions that favor a greater interaction with urban space. The space projected for experienced proximity (isochronous of 10 and 15 minutes) is not very patronized, with the most represented places being Pingo Doce de Cedofeita (supermarket), the Faculty of Law of the University of Porto, the 'Piolho' café/restaurant/bar, the Restaurante Lameiras, the Rectory of the University of Porto and the café Suave, all less than 10 minutes away. Above this distance-time, the intensity and number of references decrease significantly, with only the S. Bento railway station and Lapa tube station notable for the number of references to them. Two significant reflexive contributions emerge here. The first relates to a space within a radius of less than 10 minutes where there are ludic and sociability spaces, and the other relates to axes of arrival and departure, to non-places (Augé, 1995),

transitional spaces between places of reference. Here we stress that there is an intense attendance of spaces in a period that coincides with the school schedule. Not to be ignored is the fact that some of these leisure and social place have adapted their schedules, extending them beyond the night schedule so that they now operate from lunch time. These approaches are allied to the culture and leisure dynamics of contemporary society, related to youth culture and to the residential and urban structuring of today's city.

Figure 9. Pedestrian access to the referenced places in the vicinity of ISCET



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

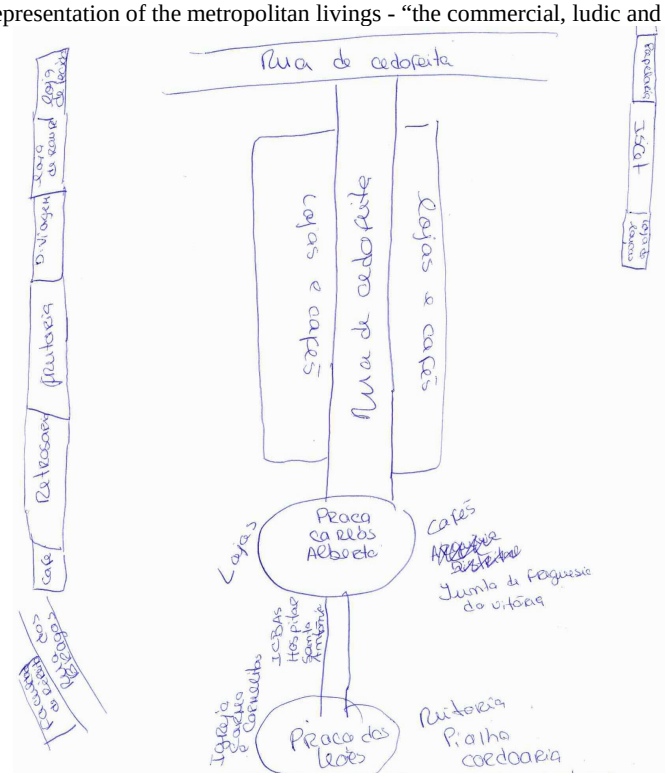
In the context of Portuguese society, and based on studies that focus on cultural practices, three different scenarios emerge: the massification introduced by the media culture that is especially felt within the domestic space; the world of more specialized and erudite productions that imply a specific cultural demand; and the activities associated with the leisure and entertainment industries. These representations of ISCET's students indicate outdoor practices that fall within the last scenario, as these industries have been getting stronger in the last decade in Portugal, mainly in Lisbon and Porto (Guerra, 2010). So we are looking at a certain glorification of the 'going out' cultures that bring together activities, meanings and spatialities that have been

deemed important with respect to the processes of sociability of young people, the constitution and renewal of the sociability and inter-knowledge networks, the shaping of lifestyles, and the mediation of identity processes (Idem, 2010).

It is also important to interlink these spatial representations with the changes in the contemporary urban scenario. The mobilization of the show and, essentially, the new modes of production of symbolic capital that are based on the city are interwoven with urban reorganization. What Edward Soja recovers from Chambers mainly intends to designate the "new contemporary way of life that is characterized by deep and immutable continuities with the past" (2000: 147). These spaces can be seen as present updates of former spaces of leisure and conviviality, they have similar functions, but base their actions on a new materiality that corresponds to the field of aspirations and the world of the thinkable of the actors concerned, mainly young and having the cultural, symbolic, social and economic resources that give them access to culture in the city. In relation to this we represent the places and spaces of day-to-day life appropriation of the ISCET students (Figure 10).

The urban ways of life of these students, mainly in the vicinity of Rua de Cedofeita, indicate a return to the center of the city that appears mapped in their lifestyles (Figures 10 and 11). We know that social phenomena have, among other things, an inter-relational character that leads us to processes such as social interaction, symbolic communication, co-presence situation, etc. Nowadays, the center of Porto (Piolho-Galerias de Paris neighborhoods) is the place of reference for nocturnal urban experiences, and it is seen as space of metropolitan sociability and conviviality. It attracts a large crowd of people as the streets and plazas are full of consumers who vary widely in social and cultural terms.

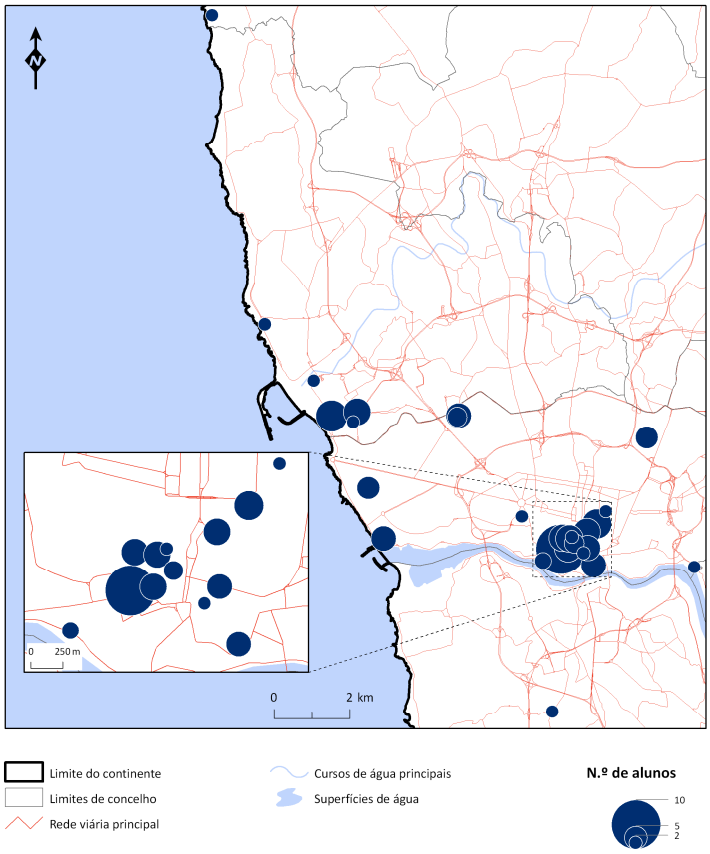
Figure 10: Representation of the metropolitan livings - “the commercial, ludic and convivial city”



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

In the past, the perception of space was strongly marked by the churches. Today, the socio-territorial references have very discontinuous scales and functions. The shopping centre dominates urban experiences (Figures 12 and 13). By modifying the organization of urban space, commerce opened up to new symbolic, ludic and aesthetic areas. The level of residential fragmentation on the peripheries of the agglomeration allows everyone to access and ‘zap’ from one shopping center to another. In terms of the social semiotics of commerce, the significance and the splendor of these spaces is discussed, very often as if they were autonomous forces capable of determining social behavior, as if the social actors might disappear behind the symbolism of the objects. We consider that these approaches all too often pay little attention to the active role of consumers in the selection and interpretation of symbols and messages. Here, we should go back to Certeau as he advocates the importance of strategies and tactics in the invention of everyday life, when confronted with massively organized and disseminated production (Certeau, 1990).

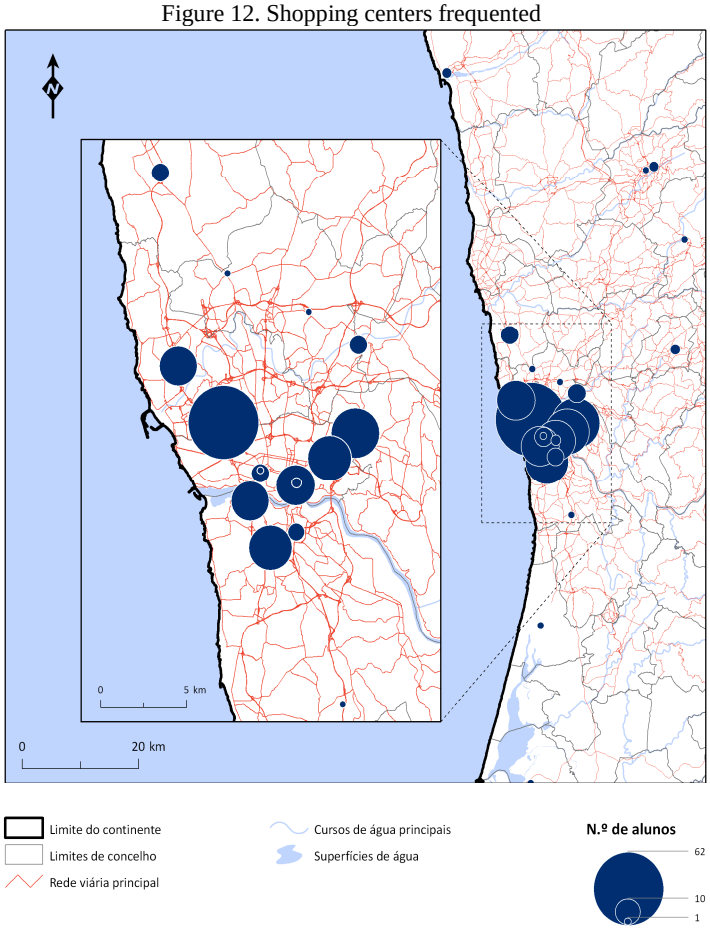
Figure 11: Leisure and recreational places (coffee shops, bars, clubs)



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

The shopping centers frequented by ISCET students (Figure 12) illustrate the metropolitan 'zapping' and clarify their importance as places of metropolitan appropriation. But, the intense attendance expressed for NorteShopping and other shopping centers illustrates the active role of consumers. They are active subjects and not passive spectators and they act within the relations of power that link them to production and commercialization strategies. So consumption has to be seen as a practice that is shaped by several forces, both material and symbolic. We are looking at a set of social relations that are inscribed in a space of close association between a space, a framework for interaction, a social configuration, and, inevitably, a cultural structure. Given this scenario, it is legitimate to say that the existence of social space depends on the points of view, i.e., its plural voices are inherent to its plural places, as social constructions that are reflected in the social practices organized in time and space.

Figure 12. Shopping centers frequented



Source: *Space and Time on Contemporary Territory* questionnaire, ISCET, 2011

Soja sees the post-metropolis as 'a distinctive variation of the themes of restructuring generated by the crisis and of the unequal geo-historical development that have been configuring (and re-configuring) the spaces of the city since the origins of urban-industrial capitalism' (Soja, 2000: 148). At the same time, 'the post-modern, post-Fordist and post-Keynesian metropolis represents something significantly new and different, the product of an era of intense intensive and extensive restructuring' (Idem: 148): dual movement of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. Are these spaces new *agoras*? Consumption, image, bodies and interactions appear to be the core of these new territorialities on the center of the metropolis. Times thus seem to be changing. Today is a time of polycentrism and this multi-centrality does not exclude the old center. Parking and traffic flow difficulties have diminished and, at the same time, these urban spaces are still the best served by public transportation and by major cultural amenities. On the whole they are spaces of great symbolic density, which propels a range of creative

activities and economies (Laundry, 2005), and of achievement, in a sphere of great cultural and civilizational liberty (Fortuna & Silva, 2002).

6. Concluding remarks

In this exploratory work, the spatial representations of the ISCET students served as the structuring framework for symbolic and social representations of metropolitan and urban space. This exercise also demonstrated the pertinence of representations as catalysts of meanings and orientations for day-to-day life and the metropolis, as well as a hypothetic field of citizenship and participation in culture and the metropolis, through processes of symbiotic production-appropriation in a framework of the rapid change of paradigms and territorial contexts.

The territories experienced by the ISCET students are guided by mobility, flows and communications, factors that are responsible for structuring today's everyday life spaces. Complex circuits in an environment of great mobility are emphasized, that lead to the prefiguration of representations shaped by the tunnel effect. This representational framework expresses a fragmented perception and a somewhat splintered image of the metropolitan space, in a discontinuity of references. Real or virtual movements in different social universes were observed, recorded at a hypertext level. The results of the questionnaire indicate that ISCET's students do not yet appreciate all the advantages that territorial insertion in the metropolitan region could give them in a context of rich and fertile spatial reality.

It was also possible to see construction processes of the metropolis composed of images that are sustained by apparently autonomous urban units: the 'mental islands'. These representations accentuate the importance of a complex and discontinuous city, reconstructed in the social space under analysis.

From the representational drawing of the urban metropolitan configuration made by ISCET's students, particular importance is given to shopping centers as extended places of consumption, but also of sociabilities, new cultural dialogues and symbolic importance in the structuring of a new collective memory that attests to really important mechanisms of metropolitan zapping that demonstrate intense processes of recreation of memories and spaces. It is also possible, in the context of representations of the city, to show a return to the center, of sorts.

Taking Simon Charlesworth's perspective, we can state that the social representations that we have addressed are guided by the following: "The spaces in which we live, then, constitute a realm of shared intelligibility, disclosed in mood, through which we come to dwell in a world defined primarily through its affective dimensions and the possibilities of being which it circumscribes. We come to know a world through an inextricable tangle of background skills and discrimination that constitute the structure of intelligibility that we unconsciously realize as the condition of personhood. Importantly, this assimilation is unselfconscious; embodied in the pervasive responses, motor skills and realized distinctions in the forms of comportment that are the inescapable conditions of being human" (Charlesworth, 2000: 17). From this starting point, it is important to approach what is happening in the school based on its outside, as the identity places outside the school seem to be of fundamental importance to the framework of the positionings analyzed. Given the emphasis on consumption opportunities, the growing reification within social interactions that leads to 'the transformation of the social relations in things' (Jameson, 1991: 314) regains importance. Along with Jameson (1991) we know that today the social genesis of post-modern productions is untraceable - they invade our day-to-day lives in the shape of ubiquitous systems of mass information and advertising or in the shape of hermetic, finished products, unable to assign a purpose other than the mere logic of cultural mass production.

But from the 'private world' we can state that the achievement of the possible city as a kind of right to the city, based on freedom of choice, expresses the proliferation of cities inside the city itself. In other words, this creates several different possible cities that are defined by choice. These choices, however, are defined as an option that lies inside a symbolic and sensory world, a partition of a greater social space unknown through its existence outside these fashionable urban places of consumption.

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