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Living in Common: Negotiating the Park in a Latin American Middle-Class Neighborhood[1]

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This study is an ethnography which has interviews, systematic observation, and participant observation as its main research methods. The case to study is the Main Park of Residential San Felipe, an archetypical middle-class residential area in Lima, Peru. This paper proposes four concepts which I consider as of great importance to understand the dynamics of public spaces: *civility, frames*, *social boundaries*, and *scales*. I will also suggest that it is important to understand the institutional framework that lies behind actions in public spaces, both to understand the quotidian dynamics that take place there, as well as to understand the resources with which people count in order to defend their right to access to it and maintain it the way it is.

Theoretical Framework

A general definition of public space is the following: "… *all areas that are open and accessible to all members of the public in society, in principle though not necessarily in practice*" (Neal 2010: 1). Currently, studies on *public spaces* are developed around the notions of *conflict* (Harvey 2006a; Zukin 1991) and *citizenship* (Caldeira 2000; Borja 2003). Public space is basically approached as the material basis for what Habermas (1989) calls the *public sphere*, or the space where individuals (citizens) meet each other, discuss and argue in equality of conditions, and reach agreements about public life. In contemporary times, this place of equality, democracy, and tolerance is considered to be threatened by capital and the market which tend not only to privatize it (Low and Smith 2006); but they also transform it to facilitate the circulation and accumulation of capital (Harvey 2006a, 2006b; Zukin 1991, 1995); to create cleaner and safer environments limiting or prohibiting the access to it of certain undesirable individuals (Davis 1992); or even to facilitate the isolation of privileged groups and the contact with other groups through the construction of gated communities (Davis 1992; Caldeira 2000; Low 2010). As a consequence, the "public" character of public spaces and the right to access them for the less privileged are threatened. Therefore the quality of citizenship is reduced.

This approach is highly respectable and counts with a large amount of evidence to support its claims. However, there is another approach to public spaces, a little older, and currently put aside precisely because of the recent importance of the process of privatization of public space. It is the *order and civility* approach which is inspired in the works by Simmel (1971a, 1971b), Jacobs (1961), White (1980), and Goffman (1959, 1966). This perspective asks

how is order possible in public places. Contrary to the conflict and citizenship perspective, the order and civility perspective has centered in the study of specific places; making an important distinction among "great public spaces" (Simmel 1971b; Goffman 1966; White 1980; Sennett 1974), public space in neighborhoods that are socially diverse (Jacobs 1961; Abu-Lughod 1994; Duneier 1999), and public spaces in homogeneous places (Suttles 1972; Kelafas 2003; Sanchez-Jankowski 2008) or places where there is tension among ethnic groups (Suttles 1968; Anderson 1990).

Besides having a more refined approach regarding the distinct type of places, the order and civility perspective finds that actors not only use public space as a public sphere or as a place of citizenship. On the contrary, in great public spaces, actors generally go through it without interacting.[2] In this way, observing public space is like observing a great "ballet on the street" as Jacobs (1961) described it: as a choreography of individuals and groups which auto-regulate to maintain their integrity and to avoid possible conflicts with others. At the basis of this set of tacit arrangements there is the notion of *civility*.

In general terms, "… [c]*ivility exists when a person does not make himself a burden for others*" (Sennett 1974: 269). In this way, a kind of social contract which allows order and avoids conflict in public space emerges (Goffman 1967). This does not mean that space is dominated by a set of rigid rules which are followed in a straight way. On the contrary, on the first place, these rules are highly diffuse and malleable. On the second place, these rules or *code of civility* (Anderson 2011) varies from place to place.

Nevertheless, order is not based only in social rules. There is also an institutional level which in some way guides or norms the use of space. This institutional framework is generally the result of a process of conflict and negotiation among the inhabitants of a place, architects, urban planners, lawyers, and the political administrative officers at different levels (municipalities, regions, or states). The result depends on the way how these different actors have related to each other and have concerted to administrate space. Anyway, what I want to add in this part is that spaces experience in a lower of higher degree the intervention of experts,

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[2] They isolate from each other looking for moments of calmness and alienation from others. If they talk in groups it is inside closed groups of friends. And if they do talk to strangers these conversations are superficial and ritualized engagements (Goffman 1966, 1967).

bureaucrats, or estate functionaries. In this way, some spaces, in order to be understood need not only the observation of public behavior. We must look beyond the place and explore the legal frames and the presence and action of different institutional actors.

Finally, after these considerations, I want to introduce three concepts which have resulted of great importance during my fieldwork. I also propose that they have great potential to understand social dynamics in public spaces: *scales*, *frames*, and *boundaries.*

The concept of *scale* appears in an intuitive way in the firsts ethnographies of the Chicago School.[3] Chicago ethnographers had the idea that not all places had similar dynamics. They were able to distinguish places that looked like enclaves and which were mostly independent of the rest of the city. Such is the case of neighborhood ethnographies such as *The Ghetto* by Wirth and *Street Corner Society* by White. These neighborhoods looked like closed environments, where almost all aspects of the life of its inhabitants happened there, and where the presence of external actors was almost irrelevant. They were completely local. However, there are ethnographies about places or neighborhoods which identity and its dynamics was highly influenced by conflict or contact with adjacent neighborhoods as is the case of *The Gold Coast and the Slum* by Zorbaugh or *The Social Order of the Slum* by Suttles. Finally, there was another type of place, which was not "local" at all, but which was simply used by complete strangers who came from distinct places of the city. That is the case of the *The Taxi-Dance Hall* by Cressey where a group of women danced for money with immigrants of different neighborhoods of Chicago. It was a kind of place which was not embedded in local dynamics, but a place of convergence of metropolitan scale. I argue that this concept of *scale* allows us to identify what types of dynamics are interconnected in a certain public space giving it a particular nature: public spaces can articulate local, district, metropolitan, national, or global dynamics (see Figure 1). I also understand that this interconnection of different scales explain its possible conflicts.

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3   Abbott (1997) uses the term "degrees of contextuality" to refer to what I call here *scales*. In this article I use the term scale because of its simplicity and because it is the way in which contemporary urban sociologists, highly influenced by the Chicago School have re-defined the concept referring to processes such as globalization (Sassen 2001) and the transformation of contemporary state (Brenner 2006).

Figure 1
Public Spaces and Scales
About here

Second, the concept of *frame* was introduced in sociology by Goffman (1986) and his followers. In a general way, a frame refers to "*… an interpretative schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action within one's present or past environment*" (Snow and Benford 1992: 137). Frames allow us to classify and understand ourselves, the others, and the external world (Zerubavel 1991). What is interesting about this concept is it is supposed that people who belong to distinct groups (by class, race, generations, or gender) many times codify a same phenomenon (for instance the public space) and act in reference to it using a corresponding *repertoire of action* (Swindler 1986). The concept of frame is also flexible, since many times it is re-defined through processes of negotiation or conflict (Small, Harding and Lamont 2010).

Finally, the concept of *boundary* was developed as a way to elaborate on the process of group-making, its differentiation from others, and their relationship of inequality and exclusion (Elias and Scotson 1994; Suttles 1968; Lamont 1992; Tilly 1999). At this point the distinction between *symbolic boundaries* and *social boundaries* becomes relevant. Symbolic boundaries refer to "*… conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space*" (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168). In this sense, the process of making and unmaking of these boundaries, that work at the level of perception, allows us to understand the characteristics that define group-members ('us') and non-members ('them'). In contrast, social boundaries "*… are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities*" (Ibid: 168). In that sense, boundaries not only create groups and identities, but also inequalities by excluding others from membership or from access to resources (Lamont 1992; Tilly 1999, 2005). It is also important to add that these boundaries are mobile and can contract to facilitate the cohesion of the group in order to exclude others, or can extent to include other groups in a larger "us" to join forces when facing a stronger enemy.

Some of the contributions that the concept of boundaries gives to this study are that it allows us to identify the process of group-making in San Felipe, its transformations, as well as its influence on public space as a strategic resource when facing the threat of invasion by other groups. As we will see, a space is characterized not only by the continuous negotiations regarding the adequate use of it, but also regarding the privilege of some group(s) to use it and rule it.

Residential San Felipe and Its Main Park

Residential San Felipe is located in the district of Jesus Maria, in Lima, Peru (area in red in Figure 2). It was built between 1965 and 1968. San Felipe has a total of 33 buildings, an approximate of 2,000 family apartments. Its architectonical plan, based on vertical construction, allows a high population density at the same time that provides a large amount of open spaces. Since San Felipe has mostly all types of facilities (a supermarket, banks, a school, small stores, and others) their residents do not need to go out of it to satisfy their basic needs.

In its origins, San Felipe was socially homogeneous. It was originally a state sponsored housing project for middle-class families. The oldest neighbors of San Felipe say that it was originally populated by young middle-class families, most of them white-collar workers and police and military officers. The generational and class homogeneity, reinforced by the architectonical design, allowed that neighborhood relations emerged through decades.

Figure 2

Residential San Felipe and Area of its Main Park

About here

The main park of San Felipe is its largest green area (area in yellow in Figure 2). It is not only one park, but a system of parks which are around 6 buildings as well as its sidewalks and parking areas. Traditionally, this area was appropriated by kids and youngsters of the area who converted this space into their play-area or territory. At the same time, this large group established relations of competition and even conflict with kids of other small neighborhoods of San Felipe. However the local school, the church, and the market facilitated some contact among them, and created a larger identity of *Sanfelipanos* in opposition to kids of other schools or neighborhoods outside San Felipe.

By the 1990s, already with 3 generations of youngsters who grew up there, the population of San Felipe started to change. In the first place, some of the old or traditional families decided to leave the area since it was highly deteriorated after the economic crisis of the 1980s. In the same way, many children who grew up there found jobs, got married, and started to form families in other places of Lima. Many of the older neighbors of San Felipe got retired and their incomes reduced drastically. Currently many of them can be considered as in poverty. Many of them divide their apartments and rent rooms as a strategy to increase their income. Finally, in current times of economic growth, other young families arrive to San Felipe and find there a nice place to live compared to the current state sponsored housing projects.[4] In this way, the old neighborhoods' boundaries inside San Felipe erased, though a boundary that encapsulates the "neighbors of San Felipe" is maintained through common problems and conflicts that rose in the last years.

Not only the population of San Felipe has changed; but also the population around its area. With the recent real-estate boom, many of the old mansions that were located on nearby avenues were demolished to build high-rise buildings, contributing to a higher density in the area. However, this increase in population was not followed by the construction of new public areas. As a consequence, many of the new families who live around San Felipe start to use the parks of San Felipe as a place for their children to play. In the same way, the revitalization of commercial activities in San Felipe and its surroundings as well as the appearance of a university nearby (Cibertec) brought with it the massive presence of office workers and students into the area.

The presence of actors coming from different places in San Felipe makes it a space in which many dynamics cross: local neighbors still use San Felipe's space as a local place; people coming from other parts of the district use it as an area park; and finally, office workers and students from different parts of Lima use San Felipe as public space of metropolitan scale. In this way, San Felipe experiences a change of *scale*, where neighborhood, district, and metropolitan dynamics mix. This generates conflicts based on different *frames* of reference on

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[4]   Apartments in San Felipe, despite of being more than 40 years old, are bigger and of better quality than apartments built in Lima recently. In the same way, the amount of green areas and parking space are great advantages and privileges in the current housing market. In this way, the price of an apartment in San Felipe has raised from US$ 35,000 in the beginnings of the 1990s to US$120,000 currently.

what space is, and how it is supposed to be used. In this process, symbolic and social *boundaries* play a crucial role.

Chart 1

Actors in San Felipe y their Relation to Public Space

About here

In summary, San Felipe and its main park have experienced transformations at different levels. First, San Felipe is not a traditional middle-class place anymore. San Felipe is, on the contrary, a space where people of different socio-economic levels meet. In fact, many of its neighbors are below the poverty line, though in terms of status they consider themselves as "professionals." At the same time there are new neighbors who can be considered objectively middle-class, though many of them achieve that position after a process of upward social mobility. It is a new emerging middle-class whose members many times come from poorer districts and who are second or third generation migrants. Second, the old boundaries among the micro-neighborhoods have dissolved and others have emerged such as that of the "traditional neighbor" and the "new neighbor"; and the "neighbor of San Felipe" and "the people from outside" (referring to office workers and students). In both cases, criteria of status and skin-color are highlighted; though these criteria in a place as Lima and San Felipe are highly fuzzy. Behind the formation of these boundaries there is a new *ecology of place* (Evans 2002) which includes new actors which meet in everyday life (see Chart 1). Finally, San Felipe has changed its scale, from being and having a neighborhood dynamic to being a place where district and metropolitan dynamics interconnect. Order in San Felipe is in state of latent conflict where many times crashes among different frames of reference regarding space meet and crash.

Middle-Class and Use of Space

For pragmatic reasons, in this article I use a definition of middle-class which concurs with the concept of *boundary*. This middle-class can be understood mainly under the combination of criteria of *class* and *status* (Weber 1958; Goffman 1951). It is important to notice that all of my informants consider themselves as middle-class despite the fact that in economic terms many live under conditions of poverty.

The status of middle-class is based mainly on professional education credentials which allowed them a higher income and prestige than the working-class and migrants. This income allowed them to cover basic needs and a relatively good school education for their children and the opportunity for them to go to universities. However, these incomes are not enough for luxuries as is the case of the upper-classes. It is important to considerer that in the case of old families of San Felipe, many of husbands and wives have retired while their children have left home in order start their new families. As a consequence, the income of traditional neighbors has decreased dramatically, though they still consider themselves as middle-class. In the case of the younger families who arrived to San Felipe in recent years, most of them are professionals or successful entrepreneurs without credentials. However it is certain that they have higher incomes than traditional families. Despite these income differences, the category of professional is more important, decreasing the importance of these economical differences inside San Felipe, and generating a *master category* (Goffman 1959) of middle-class.

In the same way, living in San Felipe is also an important mark which ascribes and equalizes its neighbors under the status of middle-class. All families in San Felipe live in apartments and buildings which are similar. Similarly, they possess a large amount of green areas. This makes them feel privileged in comparison to other middle-class families of Lima, especially those who live in the new family-apartments in places without green areas. Likewise, living in San Felipe makes these families share spaces and have relations with "other professionals" or "other educated people." In the same way, the status of San Felipe in Lima, as a typical middle-class neighborhood marks its neighbors both in the way how they define themselves and how they are defined by others as "typical middle-class."

It is also important to mention that living in San Felipe has the particularity of co-existing with a high number of manual-workers who facilitate the life of middle-class families: carpenters, plumbers, electricians, security guards, nurses, domestic workers, and others. This group of workers is visibly poorer than San Felipe's neighbors.[5] These workers constitute a parallel group-network: they are not very visible in comparison to neighbors. They congregate on the bottom of buildings and in parking spaces. Though their presence in parks and other

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[5] Differences that are evident in their way of dressing as in their status symbols as the fact of having a manual work, having indigenous features, having migrant accent, and having a lower education level.

areas is not explicitly prohibited, it is not desirable. Finally, neighbors of San Felipe have a high level of influence over municipality employees which goes from gardeners and *serenos*[6] to technicians and other high officers.

However, there is an important boundary that has erected in the recent years inside the broader category of San Felipe's neighbors. Most of the neighbors recognize a well demarcated difference between traditional or old neighbors and new neighbors. The former say about the later that they appear to have higher economic resources than them; but they highlight that newcomers are not well-educated people, not only in terms of formal educational but also in manners. Many old San Felipe neighbors mention that new neighbors are small entrepreneurs who had success but who come "*from other [poorer] neighborhoods*" (meaning by this from shantytowns or rural areas). Consequently, old neighbors ascribe new neighbors different customs than those of the traditional middle-class. As an example, they mention that new neighbors throw their garbage through their windows and not into the external garbage cylinder and that they do not understand the rules of living in an apartment building and they make lots of noise, say bad words, and even refuse to pay the maintenance fee. Finally, they mention that new neighbors are less willing to participate in the building assemblies.

At the same time, newer neighbors mention that older neighbors are very conservative and even racists. They mention that because of their age they have become intolerant to the noise of kids, forgetting that decades ago they also had kids. Now they do not allow children to play on the park since they consider the park to be an ornamental place. Finally, I also find that new neighbors prefer not to participate in building's assemblies because they say that older neighbors talk too much and are not pragmatic when making decisions; that old neighbors believe they know everything assuming that new neighbors do not have the experience, or even that old neighbors take all power positions in the assembly.

Finally, an important characteristic about common areas in San Felipe is that it is ruled by a *code of civility* (Anderson 2011), which is not hegemonic, but dominant. That code of civility is established mainly by the old neighbors of San Felipe who feel not only entitled to control space directly (specifying what is correct public behavior and what is not); but also they

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[6]   Municipality's private guards.

count with the contacts and influence over the Municipality agents (*serenos* and Municipality functionaries), as well as institutional mechanisms to implement it most of the times.

This code of civility says that space (and more specifically parks) is basically an ornamental place for serenity and contemplation: As a consequence, access to it should be restricted to some specific areas as the playground for kids. The activities of small kids are permitted in all areas of the park if they are supervised by their parents; but the activities of youngsters should be controlled in such a way that they do not damage the grass and trees and respect the serenity of the place. Eating and drinking is not allowed, especially if it is done in large groups. Similarly, riding skate in sidewalks and stairs should be prohibited since these activities are not considered as adequate in a residential area. In this way, neighbors have been successful influencing the Municipality to make flower ornaments in the parks in a way that limits activities in the park; as well as to tell *serenos* to restrict the activities of youngsters to acceptable parameters: youngsters and skaters can circulate on the sidewalks but cannot stop on them or take corners or stairs to sit or play there.

I mention that this code of civility is dominant but not hegemonic since many neighbors (especially those with small children and youngsters of San Felipe) do not share it and start to claim their right to the use of the park in ways that are different to those proscribed. In these cases, these neighbors feel entitled and even demand *serenos* to respect their children's use of the park. Many times *serenos* find themselves in the difficult situation of not knowing what to do in circumstances like these. Most of the times, if children seem to be neighbors, *serenos* just approach and tell them to be careful with plants and trees. Even in some cases *serenos* start to recognize which children are neighbors, they sometimes talk and take care of them, but ask them to be relatively quiet in order not to attract the attention of older neighbors.[7]

The situation is different for manual workers of San Felipe. Their presence was very much more visible years ago when they took their meals and had naps on the park and also played soccer in an empty track in San Felipe. However, in the last years, they have been

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[7] This type of relationship is also encouraged by the Municipality: In an interview with a high functionary of the Municipality, this person mentions me that the vision of the Municipality is to encourage the use of parks as places of recreation and the practice of sports. Skating and biking are considered by the Municipality as sports. The old neighbors of San Felipe are even considered as conservative and intolerant since they do not allow these activities.

cornered to the rear areas of the buildings or to not visible places in the parking areas, where they eat and chat. Currently they cannot play soccer in the track because some neighbors complained that they played without T-shirts, shouted lots of bad words, and drank beer after the match and urinated on the trees.

Sources of Quotidian Order

I mentioned before that in order to understand public spaces it is important to analyze the institutional framework that norms these spaces and that influences the behavior of actors. The institutional framework is also a source of power which assigns privileges to some in spite of others. This institutional framework is also changeable and is the result of a preceding crashes and conflicts among actors to maintain it or to change it. In this way, everyday relations use it and mobilize the institutional resources that can be used in situations of conflict. Figure 3 resumes what I will elaborate in this section

Figure 3

San Felipe: Space, Social Order and Institutional Framework

About here

The Institutional Space

San Felipe has a special urban plan: it is considered to be residential unit. Making changes to it is highly restricted. In respect of common spaces, these are not exactly "public spaces" but "areas in common" which are property of all owners of apartments in San Felipe. This is an important point since making changes to these spaces needs support of a majority of owners; but also because it gives them a legal support to avoid changes to it and to control its use.[8]

As I mentioned before, one of the characteristics of this space is that it counts with a permanent presence of Municipality functionaries and a high level of influence of neighbors on

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[8] Most of the neighbors of San Felipe were not aware of this situation. However, they took consciousness of this about 4 years ago when the Municipality proposed to sell part of the parking area of the commercial area of San Felipe in order to build a new supermarket. Since then, they are aware of having a legal support to defend their areas in common from possible transformations, as well as to restrict the use and even the access of people considered as undesirable. This fact is especially evident regarding the case of Cibertec students who are the target of constant critics of San Felipe's neighbors.

them (4 offices of Citizen's Participation, Security, Parks and Gardens, and Urban Planning as shown in Figure 3). In this way, neighbors constantly supervise the work of gardeners and *serenos*. 3 Neighborhood Committees also allow a better communication between the Municipality and neighbors by channeling their demands and initiatives.

It is important to highlight that these relations are constructed over time. For instance, these Municipality's offices and their higher contact with San Felipe's neighbors happened after the incident around the project of construction of a supermarket, something that weakened the image and the relationship of the Municipality with San Felipe's neighbors. With the higher presence of these offices, the relationship between the Municipality and San Felipe's neighbors strengthened, especially with the traditional neighbors who are more conservative and closer to the right-wing inclinations of the current Major.[9] The main point here is that this group of neighbors, who are closer to the activities of the Municipality in San Felipe, are those who have higher power or influence over Municipality's officers; and consequently, have a higher capacity to mobilize institutional resources to defend their vision about the use of space (the dominant *code of civility*).

Order and Civility

I mentioned above that there is a code of civility that is dominant regarding the use of space and that older neighbors enforce it and influence the *serenos* to put it into effect. However, I mentioned also that it is not the only existing code. Both younger neighbors of San Felipe and their kids propose alternatives to it and claim their right to use space. Students of Cibertec, on the contrary, are not favored in situations in which they have to face neighbors or *serenos*. That is why, most of the time their more recurred strategy is simply to avoid problems.

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[9] In this respect, it is important to mention the emergence of another boundary inside the traditional neighbors of San Felipe: an important group who are closer to the political left-wing and intellectuals who generate a strong opposition to the Major, and since then they do not accept most of the Municipality's initiatives. Not recognizing the legitimacy of the Neighborhood Committees, they created an alternative organization, a Committee for the Defense of San Felipe. Since then, there is a well demarcated boundary between traditional neighbors: those who are pro-Major, and those who are anti-Major. Anti-Major neighbors consider pro-Major neighbors as part of the "*political machine of the Major*," as "*people manipulated by the Major*," or as "*conservative*"; while pro-Major neighbors consider anti-Major neighbors as "*those related to the human rights movement*," as "*a small group of people*," or "*those looking for any initiative just to complain and gain some popularity.*"

Besides the dominant code of civility, a big part of quotidian order is based on *civility* in a broad sense or *etiquette*; that is, trying not to be a burden for others. In this way, even though this may be contradictory, the most practical way to avoid problems and to keep order is to "appropriate" space temporally and to place marks that signal a proper distance. In this way, individuals or groups signal that they do not want to be interrupted or they do not wish contact with others. For instance, many of the users of the park who perform individual activities use different strategies for demarcating their space.[10]

However, some places generate more continuous relations among users. That is the case of the playground in the park. Though most of the time I have observed that parents who take their kids there do not talk much among each other, I have also observed that a group of about 8 young parents developed there a relationship of friendship. Some of them know each other previously from the buildings where they live, but others have met in the park after months of taking their kids to play. These parents normally share advises about how to raise their kids. And again, these parents form a semi-closed group of conversation.

An important aspect of the code civility is that some types of interactions are expected according to the different status or roles of individuals. In this way, neighbors expect to be treated with respect by manual workers, *serenos*, or students. In the same way, the creation of horizontal relations is more probable among equals. For instance, domestic workers who walk the family's dog or who take care of a kid do not approach neighbors who are doing the same activity. Domestic workers, after meeting many times in the park, start to chat and even form groups in the park at certain hours of the day while the children and the dogs play. The same happens with some parents who take their children to the park, or with neighbors that walk their dogs. In the same way, students of Cibertec and office workers also form small groups and take a bench, a place on the sidewalk, or a place in the park.

Two types of actors occupy an ambiguous position which allows them to cross this group differentiation. First, there are the *serenos* who talk and even flirt with domestic workers in a horizontal way. They also talk with children in a dominant position if they are strangers, or

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[10]   To sit in the middle of a bench to avoid sharing space with others, to read newspapers, to look or use their cell-phones, to listen to music using headphones, or simply to look at the horizon. In the case of groups, they take a whole bench or form a circle to chat and they locate in a prudent distance from other groups.

in a horizontal or friendly way if these children are recognized as neighbors. *Serenos* also talk with neighbors and senior residents in a respectful and serviceable way. On the second place, the elder residents also feel entitled to talk to students, parents, or *serenos*. Elders are always treated in a respectful way by all actors.

Sources of Quotidian Conflict

However, not everything is order. Conflict arises when the code of civility is broken. This happens for different reasons: for mistakes when *framing* others leading to situations in which the honor of someone is threatened; when the dominant code of civility crashes with another code of civility defended by other neighbors; and also when what I call *crash of scales* occurs, that is, when people with different frames regarding the use of public space (as a neighborhood space in common or a metropolitan public space) meet and act according to the *repertoire of action* associated to that frame.

As should be clear at this point, Cibertec students are perceived generally as problematic by San Felipe's neighbors. San Felipe's residents see their presence as an "invasion" that affects the serenity of the place. Neighbors of San Felipe frame Cibertec students as ill-mannered, threatening because of their hip-hop way of dressing, and their physical features (skin-color) that San Felipe's neighbors associate to the residents of shantytowns.

As we have seen before, part of the erection of symbolic boundaries is based on exaggerating and highlighting the differences among the excluding group and the group to exclude, as well as by minimizing the differences inside these groups. Thus, San Felipe's neighbors tend to highlight that Cibertec students drink alcohol on the street; that they make lots of noise; that they do not respect the elder; that they destroy the plants and trees; and that they drink alcohol or use drugs during the night. Based on this, San Felipe's neighbors (and also *serenos*) are especially vigilant of their conduct. On the other side, Cibertec students frame San Felipe's neighbors as intolerant or conservative. As a consequence, Cibertec students normally try to avoid conflicts with neighbors, though the impression that they leave is completely the contrary.

Mistakes Framing Others

Some conflict situations happen when some users of the park confuse the role and status of another one because of interpreting erroneously some status signals. As a consequence, they start an interaction as if they were interacting with people of the ascribed role. However, the result is that they harm the honor or esteem of the other.

A situation like this occurs when an old neighbor confuses a new neighbor with a manual worker. A very illustrative occasion of this type of conflict is the following:[11]

> A girl about 30 years walks a dog in the morning. Her hair is black, her skin is brown, and she wears a cheap jogging suit (which is the normal appearance of a domestic worker). She stops because the dog starts to defecate on the garden. Suddenly, an old women (about 70 years, white skin, white hair, wears many rings and a necklace) walks out the door of the building, sees her, and starts shouting her: "*Hey! You have to take care of your dog. You are going to leave my garden completely dirty with that. How is it possible that people are so dirty? My Good!*" The girl is astonished by the shouts of the woman. However, she puts herself together and responds to the women speaking in a horizontal way, in a Limenian Spanish accent,[12] showing her that they have the same status: "*Ma'am, I clean the litter of my dog* (she takes a plastic bag out of her pocket and shows it to the old woman). *Who do you think you are talking to? I'm a clean person. I know there are dirty people, but that's not me. You have to look before shouting.*" The old woman is surprised for a moment. I interpret that the old women did not expected the girl to answer back, to answer as an equal, neither her Limenian accent. The old lady responds using a lower tone: "*Ok, that's Ok. However, you have to take care and clean well. Otherwise the place will be dirty after you leave.*" The girl answer in a firm tone: "*You don´t have to tell me what to do.*" The old lady continues walking. When she passes by my side she says very lowly "*Disgusting.*" I pass next to the girl who is now picking-up the mess of her dog. She seems highly irritated.

This situation shows well that the old lady interpreted erroneously the status signals of the girl, framing her as a domestic worker, and she immediately assumed that she was a person who is dirty and who does not take care of the cleanness of the place. The girl felt her honor damaged not only because she was considered as dirty, but also because she was assumed to be a domestic worker. Her response was firm, claiming an equal status as a resident and as a clean person.

Crash of Codes of Civility

Another type of conflict occurs when two actors having the same rights (neighbors) but different way of understanding or framing space meet. In this point it is important to remember

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[11]   Adapted from my fieldnotes.

[12]   Most domestic workers speak Spanish with accent that is related to indigenous/rural population.

that areas in common are property of all owners of San Felipe. As a consequence they treat space as an extension of their property. Conflict in this case occurs when a neighbor who is using this space in common is not recognized as such by *serenos* or by another neighbor.

A case like this occurs when kids riding skate happen to be neighbors. It is not rare to see old neighbors yelling at skaters and ordering them to circulate when they take a sidewalk or a stair. Normally kids respect elders and prefer to avoid conflict with them by stopping skating for a while until the elder leaves or by leaving that place and then taking another area. The situation is different with *serenos*, since they are considered by neighbors as having the same status as manual workers. Kids many times face the *serenos* and tell them that they have the right to use the space, and even that *serenos* should be taking care of them since they are residents. In this way, the *sereno* is "put in his place" by kids who are neighbors. *Serenos* then opt to allow children to play, but ask them to do it quietly to avoid conflict with elders.

Another interesting situation occurs with the local Boy Scouts group who take the whole area of the park on Saturdays. Their activities in the park include singing, playing, and shouting, which also generate discomfort by elder neighbors. Sometimes these old neighbors get down of their apartments and complain about kids' behavior asking them to stop shouting or to not step on the grass. They also call the *serenos* to do this work. However, Boy Scouts count with a permission of the Municipality to use the park. In this way they can neutralize the *serenos*. This conflicting situation is always latent and seems to recur once in a while. Nevertheless, the best strategy taken by Boy Scouts to defend themselves is to be scored by the parents who are neighbors. In this way, parents face *serenos* anytime that they pretend to take any action against the kids and claim their right on the use of space as residents.

Crash of Scales

In my conversation with Cibertec students I found that they find in San Felipe a nice place to stay and relax. Cibertec students also have a very well interiorized discourse which frames these areas as public space: they see these spaces of San Felipe in the same way as any common sidewalk or plaza of the city and behave following the norms that are acceptable in a place like that. Thus, they find it weird that neighbors complain about their presence. Cibertec students then frame San Felipe's residents as intolerant or conservative. They also consider that

when neighbors send *serenos* to remove them it is even an aggression or a restriction to their rights. Still, most of the times they prefer to avoid conflict by controlling their own actions.

On the other hand, neighbors define space in San Felipe as their property and act in a defensive way against threats, such as Cibertec students. San Felipe's residents do not mention having any problem with the presence of students or workers in San Felipe, as long as they behave and do not make noise. As a consequence, their presence is tolerated if they maintain an adequate conduct and they just pass-by or circulate in these areas. Taking or appropriating space is an activity that is allowed only to neighbors and their kids.

This type of conflict reflects what I call a *crash of scales*, where one actor consider a place to be a typical neighborhood space, while, because of external processes, this space happens to be transformed in such a way that it is now a space of a larger or broader dynamics. In this case, Cibertec students consider San Felipe as a metropolitan public space, while neighbors consider San Felipe as neighborhood space. Both of them behave in space according to the way how they understand or frame space and the script attached to that frame.

Coda

In this paper I have showed how the concepts of *frames*, *social boundaries*, and *scales* might help understand the nature and dynamics of public spaces. I find that order, conflict, and even exclusion can also be understood using these concepts. Additionally, these concepts allow us to have a more refined way to understand the different types of public spaces. I have also showed that the institutional framework is important to understand a place and that it can be used as a resource to defend it by the people who want to preserve it the way it is and to avoid the presence of strangers.

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Figure 1

Public Spaces and y Scales

Neighborhood

Districtal

Metropolitan

National

Global
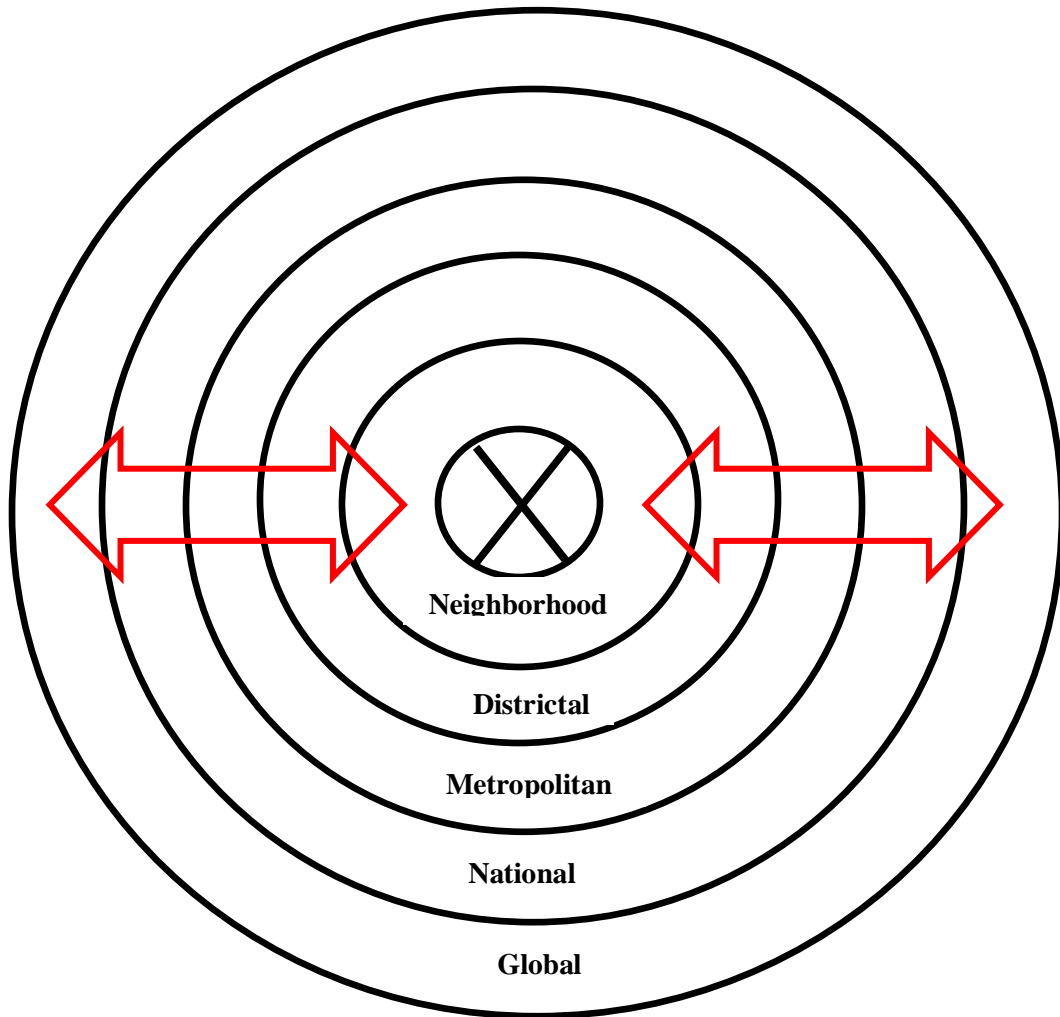
Figure 2
Residential San Felipe and its Main Park Area

Chart 1

Actors in San Felipe and their Relation to Public Spaces

Actor	Frame from which they understand San Felipe (Scale)	Presence in San Felipe	Presence in Public Space	Location
Traditional neighbors of San Felipe	Neighborhood	Old	High Everyday	Sidewalks and Playground in the park
New neighbors of San Felipe	Neighborhood	Old	Moderate Everyday	Sidewalks and Playground in the park
Manual workers of San Felipe	Neighborhood	Old	Moderate Everyday	First floor of buildings and Parking spaces
Boy Scouts	Neighborhood / Districtal	Old / New	High Only Saturdays	Whole park
Skaters	Neighborhood / Districtal / Metropolitan	Old / New	Moderate Everyday	Stairs and Sidewalks
Bikers	Metropolitan	New	Low Only weekends	Roof of the Supermarket
Serenos	Neighborhood / Districtal	Relatively new	Moderate Everyday	Sidewalks, Playground in the park, and Parking spaces
Municipality gardeners	Districtal	Relatively new	Moderate Week-days	Sidewalks and Park
Families from outside who bring their kids	Districtal / Metropolitan	New	High Everyday, especially on weekends.	Main sidewalk and Playground in the park
Office workers	Metropolitan	Old / New	High From Monday to Saturday	Main sidewalk and Park
Cibertec students	Metropolitan	New	High Everyday, but especially from Monday to Saturday	Whole park, Sidewalks, and Parking spaces

Figure 3

San Felipe: Space, Social Order, and Institutional Framework

Office of District Security

Office of District Urban Planning

Property Legal Framework

DIRECT CONTROL BY NEIGHOBORS

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMITEES

Construction of Relationships among Different Levels

Office of District Citizens' Participation

Office of District Parks and Gardens