What Politics is This Place? (Post)Glocal Politics in Latin America's Public Spaces

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POST TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS
IN A POST GLOBAL WORLD

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QUESTIONING THE “PUBLICNESS” OF PUBLIC SPACE IN POSTINDUSTRIAL CITIES
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There has been a long and multidisciplinary tradition of studying the contemporary use and meaning of urban spaces. Yet most of these studies focus on North American and European cases, and most emphasize analysis of everyday experience. This paper aims to make novel contributions to this arena of study in two significant ways: first, by focusing on Latin American cases, which have been understudied (at least in the literature in English); and second, by emphasizing the exploration of extraordinary uses and meanings of these spaces rather than their everyday experience. By exploring different contestations of uses and meanings in public spaces, the paper sheds light on the contemporary, convoluted redefinitions of citizenship and democracy in Latin America — and by extrapolation, the world.

This study will theoretically and empirically contribute to the exploration of the two-tiered concept of society as lifeworld and as system that Jürgen Habermas discussed in his Theory of Communicative Action (1981). It will also shed light on the difference, yet complementarity, between processes of “making life” and “making history” enacted by ordinary people in ordinary spaces at extraordinary times (Flocks, 1988). In addition, the study positions the scrutiny of democracy and citizenship in physical urban space, empirically grounding these critical debates, reawakening awareness of the role of space in the politics of culture and the culture of politics, and adding this underexplored spatial dimension to the prevalent sociological and political-science perspectives on the transitional dynamics of democracy and citizenship in Latin America.