Palimpsests from the Province of Buenos Aires. Past, present and future of Trenque Lauquen City's territories and places

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Presentation: Theme B

IMPRINTS, MARKS, PALIMPSESTS, TRENQUE LAUQUEN

Abstract:

This paper was written within the framework of a thesis project for the Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Buenos Aires.
It deals with a case study of Trenque Lauquen City (located in the northwest of Buenos Aires Province, Argentina**); it attempts to understand processes of territorial transformation experienced since the city was founded, in 1876.
The "round lake", which gives its name to the city in the language of the Mapuche Indians, is surrounded by urbanization, and located within the sub-humid Pampa. According to the last census of population and housing, it hosted 30,764 of the 13,827,203 inhabitants of the province's territory in 2001. It concentrates the main regional economic activities: agriculture, dairy farming and cattle raising. Secondary and tertiary activities also take place there: manufacturing industry, services and commerce.
Our research activities are aimed to studying the territorial organization and the places developed through the history of Trenque Lauquen. To that end we apply theoretic-methodological criteria for territorial analysis from the analysis guidelines of time-space, systems of objects and systems of actions.

Keywords:

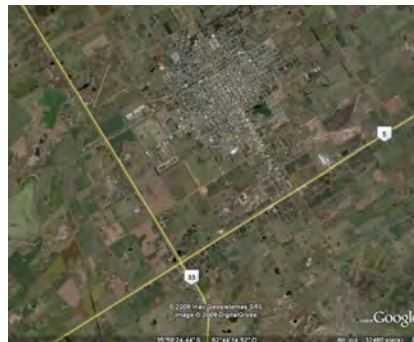Palimpsests, territorial transformation, territorial organization, places, territory

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[1] According to the Dictionary of the Spanish Language of the Royal Spanish Academy, "palimpsest" means: 1. m. Old manuscript that keeps marks of previous writings, artificially erased. 2. m. Old tablet in which what was written could be erased to write again on it.

Introduction

The Municipality of Trenque Lauquen[2] is located in the northwest of Buenos Aires Province, Argentina; 450 km from the Federal District and 80 km from the Province of La Pampa, in the sub-humid Pampa region. It encompasses 5,500 km², limits at the N.W. with the Municipalities of Rivadavia and Pellegrini, at the N.E. with Carlos Tejedor and Pehuajó, at the S.E. with Daireaux and at the S.W. with Guaminí and Tres Lomas.

It has approximately 45,000 inhabitants (INDEC, 2008). And it currently hosts the administrative center city, also named Trenque Lauquen, rural areas and 16 towns: Treinta de Agosto, La Carreta, Beruti, La Porteña, Mari Lauquen, Trongé, La Zanja, Lértora, Magnano, Corazzi, Francisco de Vitoria, Duhau, Girodías, Garré, Colonia Maribel and Primera Junta, most of them mainly rural.

With almost 600 hectares, the city of Trenque Lauquen is located at the intersection of two national roads: National Road 5 that links it to the Port of Buenos Aires, and National Road 33, that communicates it to the Ports of Bahía Blanca and Rosario **(Picture 1)**. The railroad network connects it to the Ports of the Rosario-Puerto Belgrano corridor.

Picture 1: Intersection of National Roads 5 and 33
(Source: Satellite image in Google Earth 2009)

The 2001 Population and Housing Census registered in the city 30,764 inhabitants of the 13,827,203 people living in the provincial territory, although its population is currently estimated around 40,000, as a result from a rapid growth experienced during the last 20 years, in which it doubled its population.

1. Concepts and method

Among the different approaches available to interpret city growth, we chose –as a useful and supplementary point of view– that of palimpsests[3] to apply it to the city of Trenque Lauquen; its territorial transformation through the 20th Century, like in other pampas cities, explains a very dynamic process that has gone beyond the predictions of its inhabitants and leaders. A process originated decades ago and accelerated by the activities of real state local groups, which since 2001 have started to modify significantly some sectors of its urban morphology.

"We start from the premise that to understand each territory it will be necessary –to a certain degree investigate, know and understand public and private actors that have an impact on it (1), the geographic environment, the natural and the artificial hybridized in techniques (2), its most significant systems of objects and systems of actions (3), its main events in time and space (4) and the articulation between the local, the meso and the global, that with its verticalities and horizontalities weave each territory (5)" **(Bozzano, 2000:179-215).**

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[2] It concentrates the main regional economic activities: agriculture, dairy farming and cattle raising. Secondary and tertiary activities also take place there: manufacturing industry, services and commerce.

[3] In this work we build on a conceptual proposal of Reboratti (1993:17) that understands palimpsest as a representation of the superimposition that makes the territory, accumulated and modeled by the interaction of consecutive generations and natural causes that had an impact on it.

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The implementation of the model consists of five stages:

1. Creation of an introductory conceptual framework to calibrate the municipal performance and the current legal framework for the city, that will enable us to tackle a second phase for the preliminary design of the model from de definition of palimpsests, a survey of the relevant information and database design for a Geographic Information System[4].
2. A pilot analysis of a city sector that will evaluate the available census statistics, the productive orientation of each neighborhood based on aspects of real state, urban regulations and accessibility to the areas of study, as well as the identification of those elements related to urban structure and morphology in the regional scale, within the framework of official provincial information.
3. Definition of a corpus of relevant variables for the urban diagnosis and analysis of the selected area.
4. Processing the model from the chosen variables.
5. Conclusions and recommendations on its future applicability, testing information exchanges.

This model will provide for an organic and sustainable planning of land uses and suggestions on governmental actions for the chosen neighborhoods.

We particularly foresee the development of a new method, a new way of discovery, for the subsequent promotion of the vocations of places and territories. The analysis will be useful to distinguish among different types of places suggested by Bozzano (Bozzano, 2009:474), those with a vocation for centrality, residential, productive, destined to facilities or undefined; for example to prefigure, configure and strengthen a strategic plan that favors the development and governance of that territory.

As we previously mentioned, we are particularly interested in showing the mutations experienced by buildings in Trenque Lauquen and, when deciding on a method to record them, we resorted to the method applied by Cacopardo to *"capture, starting from the household and taking the block as a unit of analysis, the city in its diverse movements"*; identifying the material clues: *"a new logic of plot articulation, a new spatial arrangement, a technique, a change in a façade"* **(Cacopardo, 2003:151)**.

It will be useful to analyze the transformation in a first sample survey (1 macro-block, the sector of the urban foundation of 1876), that will enable us to determine the new building impacts in the city and to elaborate a series of periodizations.

To minimize the chance of this sort of improvisations, we will consider as sources for the model: the available cartography in different scales, such as building plans and utility infrastructure that make up the supply for the territory under analysis; governmental digital cartography, 1991 and 2001 National Censuses of Population and Housing, the Land Use Planning Code and materials obtained by the in-place survey to update and supplement other information.

2. *Selected criteria for territorial analysis*

According to the analysis guidelines "time and space" and "systems of objects and systems of actions" we analyze the urban structure[5] to unearth its marks and imprints.

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[4] GIS: Computer system for managing geographically referenced data. It allows for the geographic visualization, sharing and analysis of data, creating different maps that express the required information for each area, to analyze information entered by hand or from other sources, such as the Internet.

[5] STRUCTURE: by this we mean the distribution and order of urban parts "An urban agglomeration is much more than a mere succession of buildings and streets. *The city is a structured entity where areas of centrality stand out, these are nodes where some activities take place preferentially, which themselves are linked by corridors through which circulate the flows that connect them. The identification of those centralities allows for the understanding of the working and organization of cities"* (Source: Environmental Atlas of Bs. As. http://www.atlasdebuenosaires.gov.ar).

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The time-space guideline

This guidelines refers to *"ongoing events, marks, imprints, moments of the territorial organization process[6], creation, expansion, consolidation, strengthening, stagnation and withdrawal"* (Bozzano: 2009,103).

In this context, "mark" and "imprint" are defined as objects and things, and actions and practices, respectively, signified in the past and interpreted and re-signified in a present (Bozzano: 2009, 133). Marks would be more associated –though not exclusively– to past systems of objects, while imprints would let us understand the systems of actions of the past.

The systems of objects and systems of actions guideline

This guideline describes the *"patterns of occupation and patterns of appropriation for each place"*. We're dealing with linked and mutually determinant systems in a particular territory, and its joint analysis allows to explicitly state their historic reality (Santos; 2000:73 en Bozzano, 2009: 103-115).

3. Archeology of the palimpsest

Trenque Lauquen was founded in 1876 by the "round lake" that lent the city its Mapuche Indian name. The lake has been enclosed by the city, which started up as an advance party post against the Indians. The first design for the urban area that took place in august 1877 only comprised by the railroad tracks and a few streets, here are a few references: "In April 27, 1976 the town's layout started. *Blocks of 100 square meters, divided by 30 meters streets, allowed for the easy operation of the cavalry and the like. There are 9 blocks and the central one is destined to the square…"* **(MTL, 1998:17)**.

At the end of the 19th century, the urban space was experiencing a certain growth due to the occupation of some of the immediate periphery plots; however, the trend for rural life was still present: large extensions of land, destined to large and small and large farms, were partially incorporated to urban life through very incipient transportation infrastructure.

Cartography is among the main documents used for this work. From the current urban plan and a revision of previous ones, it has been possible to revive Trenque Lauquen's history, through its growth process and most evident transformations. We have not yet been able to obtain satisfactory documentation regarding the intervention of construction main actors –public and private agents– in the second half of the 20th century, there is, however, the chance to work with the actors themselves to understand the transformations undergone by the city. On the other hand, a retrospective outlook to review those fundamental aspects that have contributed to its configuration.
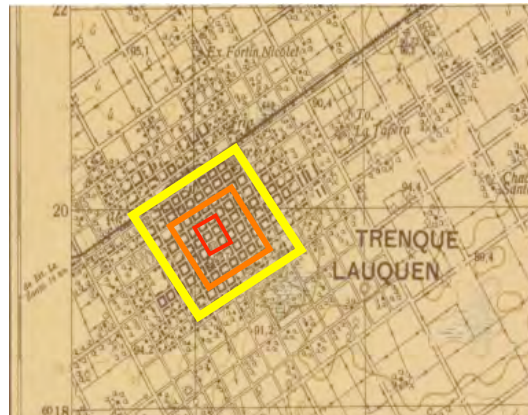
It will allow for a sort of archeology of the palimpsest for this city. The layers or texts revealed by that archeology will result in a map of the evolution of the city and the tensions and solutions tried out, that either worked or not for that territory; maps or diagrams[7] that may prove useful for the analysis of historic scenarios and the assessment of policies implemented through its history.

Between 1912 and 1914 the General Belgrano Railroad extended its services 460 km and passed through the city, by the second half of the 20th century the expansion went on and the population had reached a significant number. A topographic chart

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[6] Throughout this presentation we understand territorial organization as a social process of appropriation of space in time. Each historic moment expresses the spatial organization mode as a consequence of how social conflicts are solved through the territorial appropriation process. This is why territory is considered as a multi-dimensional consequence within a historic process, a system that combines spaces and processes, with characteristics that can only be understood through its becoming.

[7] These forms of analysis are related to other central themes for the LIA-TAG Team, related to the development of theoretic-methodological criteria for territorial analysis.
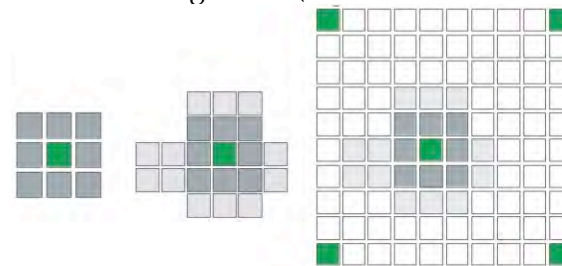
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shows the changes experienced by the urban densification frontier by 1952 (Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.).

Picture 2: Sector of a 1952 topographic chart
(Source: National Geographic Institute).

The political and social, but most of all economic, transformation experienced by the pampas territory had also pervaded this city. From a morphological point of view, certain representations of modernity were taking shape, however, the growth of the street network showed a clear dominance of the colonial layout.

The analysis of marks, imprints and the foundational pact[8] facilitates establishing theoretical-methodological criteria to define and apply the concept of territorial organization process in diverse scales; and the evolution of the urban structure defines a clear mark through time (Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.).
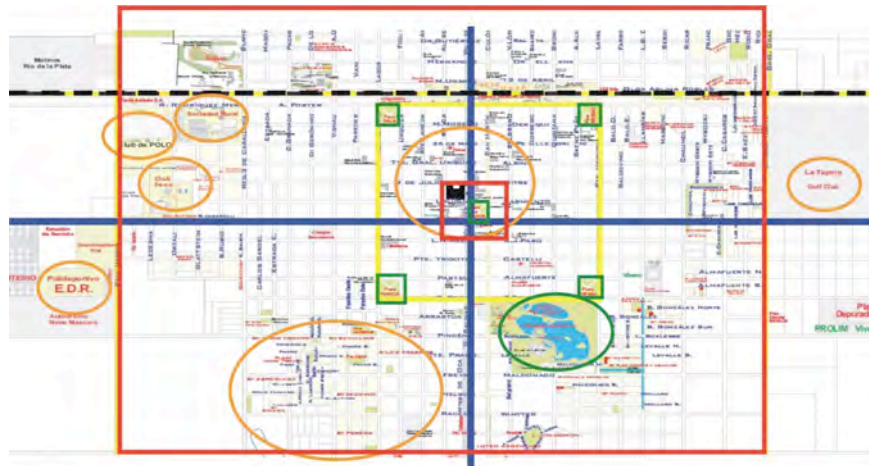

Picture 3: Urban structure evolution schemes for Trenque Lauquen
(Source: developed by author)

This time we were able to read nine out of the ten logics of territorial occupation and appropriation researched by the LIA-TAG team. They are the following: Metropolitan center, three types of sub-centers, central corridors, consolidated neighborhoods, weak suburb, industrial; logistic and similar, large equipment, intensive periurban productions, enclosed city, environmentally fragile or degraded[9] places and weak periphery **(Picture 4)**.

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[8] The foundational pact is an event by which certain subjects decide to create a place, according to individual or group, conscious or unconscious, economic, politic, social, religious or other motivations.

[9] Bozzano, H. (2000:179-215)

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Picture 4: Systems of objects and systems of actions (meso scale)
(Source: developed by author)

4. *Needs, wishes and collective possibilities*

What we have expressed so far allows for the identification and consideration of the diverse temporal and spatial characteristics of actors, facts, phenomena, and natural and social processes to investigate the related causes and consequences. As we have proposed in another work, we know that "We can recognize ourselves in the city as we discover and accept our capacities, and the realization of those capacities is a form of self-perpetuation. Writing a book, planting a tree and having a child are all actions that intend to leave a mark" (Alva, M. y Gurman, L. 2009:99).
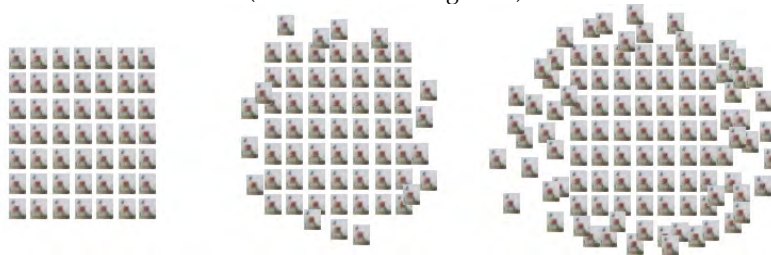
This is why it is imperative to improve land use planning and that management models for urban planning constitute, starting from timely and accurate information, tools for a sustainable administration at the municipal level. From the design of a management model that takes into account the most actors that participate in land uses that currently take place in the city we agree with the following:

"Planners have the obligation to create a city in which the citizens may recognize themselves and assume their responsibilities. This depends not only on the physical construction of the city but also, to a large extent, on the availability of educational and participatory channels (in all levels), to give citizens the chance to involve themselves and the means to fulfill their obligations" **(Alva, M. y Gurman, L. 2009:99)**.

In Trenque Lauquen, as in many other cities in the Province of Buenos Aires, high buildings are being built, copying constructive models of single-family housing that don't take into account the collective needs, wishes and possibilities, and a lack of territorial co-construction can be perceived. Let us imagine the hypothetical situation of a family without a decent house that allows it to feel part of the city, of "their city"… it would be unfair; but… What if this happens to an entire city? What if there is no urban planning for it? **(Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable. and 6)**.

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Picture 5: Marks and imprints, planning is no joke
(Source: Clarín Magazine)

Picture 6: Territorial co-construction
(Source: developed by author)

5. *Some thoughts some conclusions and method applications*

This work has greatly benefited from the activities that took part during the intense and fruitful hours shared with the LIA-TAG Team.

We expect that ideas and formalizations generated through this research will lead to significant applications for other cities and towns within the municipality of Trenque Lauquen and its surroundings in the Pampa region.

At this specific stage we incorporated housing as an urban analysis cell because we are looking for concrete results (whether they are partial or representative) that will allow us to continue with the proposed line of research.

Beyond the application of the new method we believe it is important to interact with political actions, plans and programs. The challenge is there to extend this method to the management of diverse territorial dynamics that take place in other Argentine cities. New challenges constitute a chance to prepare ourselves for urban changes.

In a previous work we proposed that *"Encouraging peace states as an overcoming and explicit moment of recognition to remediate the various urbalgies[10] that afflict us […] is an urgent must"* (Alva, M. y Gurman, L., 2009:99). Our current proposal intends to contribute to advancements in territorial intelligence, information and methods to understand heritage, culture, and identity, the sense of belonging and possibilities of each territory.

Argentine territories are transforming as a consequence of the deepening of globalization, the application of policies, plans and programs, as well as responses from diverse actors (social, territorial, business, etc.) that develop their strategies adapting or innovating the way the territory and its resources are used. Different Argentine territories show transformation dynamics with direct impacts on natural resources and diverse actors, among them: rural communities, local governments, and even business actors.

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[10] We chose the term *urbalgy* (a combination of a Latin prefix that means city and a Greek suffix that represents pain) to name the diverse "urban pains" that we suffer from inhabiting large cities, as well as the pathologies experienced by cities themselves.

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This proposal seeks to contribute information and methodologies to heritage, culture and the possibilities for each territory to the advancement of territorial intelligence.

Lastly we want to leave the door open for a new road: reflecting on the concepts of sustainability and globalization and their transfer to the architectural-urban field.

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7. *Photographic annex*

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