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PUTTING URBAN CONTEXT IN THE DEBATE: BIBLIOMETRIC APPROACHES FROM THE META-ANALYSIS OF SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concepts used in the diverse Social Sciences go beyond a threshold where its sense, definition, application, use, and conceptualization are poured out and become great containers of a series of ideas and conceptions. As time has gone by, these concepts stop being the subject of debates and become part of the common tradition of the areas involved. This implies that discussions that arise in research, congresses, seminars and workshops can be formed by a series of preconceived theories about the concepts which are being talked and written about. As a result, from time to time, it is necessary to do an exercise of self-reflection and confirm what we are talking or writing about when we refer to said concepts.

In areas like architecture, the concept of context has represented an area of important discussion. During the 1950s, there was an in-depth debate about context, due to the modern trends in architecture, which paid close attention to the context of urban projects. In this sense, as Komez-Daglioglu (2016) mentions, during the 1980s the context in architecture begins to mainly connect with the historic settings of urban projects. This change is based on the paradigmatic changes in architecture, from modernism to post-modernism (Komez-Daglioglu, 2016). This same author reaches the conclusions in that today, the context is a term that has been ignored and is overused in the theory and practice of this area.

In this context, the goal of this article is to contribute to this discussion using a bibliometric and operative approach of urban context in disciplines such as architecture, urban studies, design, history, anthropology, and sociology. In that sense, this starts with a theoretical revision of the aspects we consider as the most important to understand and, more than anything, move forward in a conceptualization, continuing with a bibliometric revision method to make a meta-analysis of the urban context, to finally conclude with some possibilities to adjust this definition. Conceptualization that, just as has been indicated, belongs to a recurrent use, though this does not indicate that it has been understood in the complexity, and above all, in the usefulness it has in the contemporary city.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Putting context in context

The context is a term used to refer to everything surrounding the phenomenon being considered (Van Dijk, 2016). This degree of broadness displays a universe of ambiguities that darken the light of the term. For Grădinaru (2013), "this means that the notion is mainly used in quite an intuitive and pre-theoretical sense, that is to say, as some type of socio-cultural or political setting, for an event or action, and very often, more as a condition than as a consequence of said event" (2013:119). The definition agreed upon by diverse areas allows, broadly speaking, to know, in colloquial terms, what we are referring to when we say context. However, this denotative semantic consent, without considering it as wrong, must be adjusted to the depth of the contemporary spatial work, especially because it would allow understanding the nature of the factors these comprise, as well as those that affect the context, providing a conceptual framework that makes the evaluation of the urban context easier, given the relevance it has, especially for territorial studies (Acedo, Painho & Casteleyn, 2017).

In broad terms, we can say that in order to interpret the urban space, we need to understand it within its context and, since both the space and its transformations are governed by this, the urban context requires an approach that is more adjusted to the current processes of the Latin American city. Although Van Dijk (2016) will say, "the first problem we find in this theory is that the notion of context is extremely vague and ambiguous [...], in the way that it is used in daily, non-technical speech, the term context often means situation, environment, setting, geographical, historical or political background" (2016:16). Once again, the difficulty of understanding what urban context refers to appears, since it covers such a broad spectrum, complicating its comprehension and the role it plays.

Van Dijk will establish that the interpretation of the spatial setting will require a selective attention that allows reducing the complexity. Grădinaru mentions, on revisiting the socio-cognitive interpretation of the context that Van Dijk makes, that the prevailing discourses "make a communicative investment that is adjusted to the relevant position: they only include aspects that seem sufficiently outstanding" (2013:122). This is based on the premise that individuals interpret the city as an integrated system of symbols, which have been built over time, and just like the discourse, interact with the setting depending on given simple interpretations of the space, making instantaneous interpretations of the place. This pre-cognitive journey, in other words, outside the consciousness, does not mean to say that it lacks complex processes, that are accumulative of knowledge (Thrift, 2008).

On the other hand, according to the Human Geography Dictionary, edited by Derek Gregory et al (2009), the context is originated with respect to language, where the character located in the space-time of social life contains a double

meaning, in terms of circumstances and connections. Thus, the authors establish that “just as the text, the context is a metaphor derived from the Latin *texere*, to weave, and in the tradition of interpretation, context refers to the coherence of the text, the connections between the parts and the whole” (Gregory et al: 2009; 111). This term was introduced into Geography by the Swede, Torsten Hägerstrand, who observed similar attributes to those seen by Gregory et al (2009). For Hägerstrand (1989), the objects and events could not be separated, but rather they were part of a series of activities that together form a network of paths, formulating the idea of network, as a postulate of the contextual approach (Ellegård & Svedin: 2012). In this way, contextual effect is defined as “the impact of the local environment on the attitudes and behaviors of individuals” (Gregory et al: 2009; 110). The contextual effect, unlike the compositional effect that attaches the attitudes and behaviors of individuals to non-geographic positions within societies – like the ethnicity, gender, class, among others – claims the society’s geographically located character (Suzuki, Kashima, Kawachi & Subramanian: 2012). According to Gregory et al (2009), “Being in the world involves both inclusive (being member of a significant world) and positional (having a particular place in the world defined by features like gender, ethnicity, etc.)” effects (Gregory et al: 2009; 110).

On the other hand, dictionaries that have been made over hundreds of years, experimenting, by trial and error, the optimal way of defining, in some cases, a word or a concept, even experiencing modifications as time has gone by (Lauria: 2013), define context as a setting (that which surrounds), without which the fact cannot be suitably understood. This is discussed by Grădinaru (2013), who sustains that context is often used in the sense of being a condition of the phenomenon, hiding the possibility of being a consequence of this. Under this premise, a potential of argumentation opens, which is much greater than just reducing the context to a circumstantial matter. From here we can understand the multidimensional connection of context, but one where the individual will only pay attention to some elements, simplifying the interpretation of the whole. On choosing those elements, it is easier to understand urban context. Cairney & Weible (2018), in a study related to politics, argue that the context in which policy preparation is studied changes with the space and time, which supports the idea that variability is given by the greater attention that individuals pay to some aspects of the context, discarding others on considering them as irrelevant.

With language being the most important factor of social communication, it also is a social tool for creating reality (Berger, Luckmann, Zuleta, 1968). Lakoff & Johnsen (2003) suggest that our conceptual system is, to a great extent, metaphoric, so the common Latin origin, *texere*, as we mentioned, weave, confirms this statement, representing context as the image of fabric, a net. Therefore, by definition, we know that the network forms part of our reality and general context, built based on daily life. For Lakoff and Johnsen, “Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in the definition of our daily realities” (2003:4). Currently, we

tend to often hear the word *network* and we have almost become used to it. While in the modern era the system worked around the metaphor of the chain, today it is adjusted to a net (Castell, 2009). However, the mental image of a net also produces a degree of confusion, because chains are often seen as hierarchically organization linear structures. Nevertheless, an interesting piece of work by Schmidt di Friedberg (2018) about the geographies of disorientation, allows us to approach the transgression produced currently, through multiple, organized or disorganized, structures that are appearing in space and that respond to an interrelated, subjective and sometimes confused perspective.

III. METHODOLOGY

The characteristics of scientific production associated to the urban context are analyzed within a bibliometric corpus. This work uses the *Web of Science* (WoS) database, renowned in the scientific community, as the case study. The bibliometric analysis was made with the help of the specialized software, HistCite and VOSviewer, which will be key to obtaining the results of this study. The keyword, “urban context”, was used in *Web of Science*’s search terms, resulting in a total of 1,323 documents, which represent the sample. These were filtered using the following criteria: the categories assigned were urban studies, architecture, history, anthropology, and sociology. In the first, there was a total of 174 articles, while there were 117 in the second, followed by history with 61 texts, anthropology with 31, and sociology with 41. This provides a total of 424 publications, from which only research articles were chosen, giving a final total of 391. These records were stored with all the necessary fields for their processing in HistCite and VOSviewer, namely, the authors, institutional affiliation, title, journal, language, type of document, keywords, abstract and the cited bibliography. The timeframe the selection covered was from 1977 to 2017 (See Figure N°1).

Figure N°1. Methodological Flow
Source: Own preparation.

IV. RESULTS

On the disciplinary frontiers of the urban context: revision of the literature from the bibliometry

In the literature of disciplines like architecture, urban studies, urban design, and construction, the concept of “urban context” appears as associated to a series of features that are typical of the city, its dynamics and relations with those who live there. The intention in the following section is to show how scientific literature has analyzed this concept from 1977 to 2017. The revision has considered around 391 articles that cover a timeframe of close to 40 years. These articles were processed using the HistCite software, which establishes two indices for

their ranking. The first of these is related to Local Citation Score – LCS, which allows seeing the impact of an article by means of its citation within the 391 publications chosen. The second index refers to the same impact by citation, but by year – LCS/t (See Table N°1).

Table N°1 – Terminology associated to the bibliometric analysis
 Source: Own preparation based on Wulff (2007) and Garfield (2004).

In general terms, 391 articles, 727 authors, 216 journals, 13,594 cited references, 1,685 keywords, the scientific production of 56 countries around the world, 399 institutions of different natures (universities, non-governmental organizations, among others), were analyzed. The evolution of the concept in question shows a rising trend regarding the number of publications between 1977 and 2017. This trend increases considerably as of 2007 to 2016⁶ (See Figure N°2).

Figure N°2 – Evolution of scientific production
 Source: Own preparation.

However, the impact on scientific production in the 391 publications – LCS and LCS/t – shows important variations. In 2001, research is produced that will have a high citation (5 TLCS), followed by 2004 (4 TLCS), before the impact falls considerably towards 2005 with a TLCS of 2, 2007 with 1 and dropping towards 2009 and 2012 with 1 TLCS (See Figure N°3).

Figure N°3: Impact at a local level (TLCS) of scientific production between 1977 and 2017.
 Source: Own preparation.

Scientific production is concentrated in countries located in North America, Europe, Oceania, Asia and, in some cases, in Ibero-America. When checking which countries produce the highest impact research, countries like the United States, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, and England appear as the places where this kind of research is produced. Regarding the place of the publication where articles about this concept are present, journals focused on diverse perspectives appear, such as urban studies, landscape, urban planning, regional research (See Table N°2). A diversification of perspectives can be seen, where the research about “urban context” is being done, which is why they are not limited to aspects where these issues had traditionally been studied, but rather journals on education, urban ecosystems, among others, also appear.

Table N°2 -Scientific production of the main journals between 1977 - 2017 Source: Own preparation.

The journal with a high citation impact on local literature (TLCS) is *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* with 6, followed by *Urban Education* with 5, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* with 2, *Ecaade 2009: Computation: The New Realm of Architectural Design* with 1, and then *Housing Studies*, also with 1. On the other hand, among the top twenty authors who have generated a considerable production on this concept, we can find the following:

Figure N°4 – Scientific production by authors between 1977 - 2017. Source: Own preparation.

On ranking scientific production following the impact that each author has on the local collection, it is possible to note considerable changes, since Bernal, D. reaches first place on the list, that is to say, although the author has only published one article on the issue, her publications have a higher impact on the literature. In this way, this author has the highest impact index on the research, along with Solorzano D.G., Cammarota, J, Brayboy B.M.J, Purcell, M., Balaban, O. Therefore, if we rank these authors according to the annual number of times they are cited by others within the local collection, it is possible to notice the 10 most influential articles within the sample. Bernal & Solorzano (2001) continue in first place with their study on the analysis of the transformational resistance through a critical race framework, considering Chicano and Chicana students in an urban context, followed by Cammarota (2004) on the gender and racialized pathways of Latino youth, struggles and resistance in an urban context, from the anthropological perspective (See Table N°3).

Table N°3. Record matrix ordered by number of times this is cited by others within the chosen collection Source: Own preparation.

As can be seen in the previous table, the interests which have the highest impact within the topic of “urban context” are related to different analysis about urban tribes, gender, raciality, climate change and cities, social justice, resistance, citizenry, urban topologies, housing policies, poverty, education and gender differences, ethnic minorities, among others. To discover the topics that are found on this issue with more clarity, it is necessary to turn to the keywords. On applying an analysis method of the co-occurrences of the keywords, 6 clusters are clearly seen (See Figure N°5).

Figure N°5: Co-occurrence of keywords of the “urban context” sample Source: Own preparation.

In the first cluster it is possible to identify keywords like China, discourse, education, ethnicity, growth, housing, knowledge,

6 2017 was only considered to August, as such it shows only 12 publications, below the 49 publications of 2016.

mobility, policies, poverty, privatization, religion, urban context, urban space, urbanization, youth. This corpus of concepts reveals some areas of study about given phenomena in the urban context, like ethnicity, growth, housing, education, poverty, privatization processes and religious events in the urban space (See Table N°4).

Table N°4 – Co-occurrence of keywords (clusters)
Source: Own preparation.

As can be seen in Table N°4, in each cluster it is possible to generate associations among the topics that are mentioned in them. For example, in the second cluster it is seen that in England, the study of the urban context is related to consumption, environment, tourism, regeneration, nature and planning. These keywords are associated to the institutions where this knowledge is produced. In this sense, the university with the highest number of publications is the Delft University of Technology (6), followed by University College London (6), the University of California at Berkley (6), the Polytechnic University of Milan (5). With regards to the prevailing literature that is cited in the bibliography, of the 391 articles, it is possible to note that the sources used date from the 1960s to the start of the 90's (See Table N°5).

Table N°5 – References with high citation index in the local collection Source: Own preparation.

These references would be the mainstream of the literature related to the urban context. As can be seen, this has been built on the base of the accumulated scientific production of the authors that have generated recent scientific literature. This implies that, within disciplines like urban studies, architecture, history, anthropology and sociology, the urban context is a concept under construction and is a recent reflection.

V. RESULTS IN DISCUSSION

The urban context and its contradictions

Urban context, a term used relatively recently in scientific production, stands out within social sciences, and especially in matters related to the territorialization of phenomena. Its character, placed in space-time, is not just a relevant condition of the phenomenon, but it is also possible to observe urban context as a consequence of the phenomenon in question. The use of urban context as an approach framework to the phenomena that occur in the city is, above all, due to its interpretative potential. It allows facing, through the construction of a theoretical position, the coherence of urban connections. Therefore, with urban context being an interpretative framework, the contextual effect comprises the situationality of society, and the choice of said interpretation

approach is chosen by the researchers to ask about the deep relationship between geography and the individuals. As can be seen in the analysis of the scientific production, the first thing is that “urban context” has started to be used relevantly in the chosen areas. This is not that surprising if we consider that urbanization processes have intensified around the world, especially in North America, Latin America, and Asia. On checking the clusters (see Table N°4) that are produced from the relationship of the concept of “urban context” with the different urban realities of each case, these show different situations about this concept. For example, the first cluster that includes China – Asia – as an important keyword, associates the urban context with poverty, policies, housing, urbanization, urban space, and growth. Meanwhile, the second cluster, where the UK appears, is associated to keywords like community, planning, regeneration, nature, design, environment, and landscape. Finally, in the fourth cluster, the United States appears, along with Chile, with climate change, gender, history, market, smart city, and public space. With this, it is possible to conclude that urban context is associated fundamentally with emerging issues.

As a result, urban context as a concept is related to four countries, on different continents, as well as to diverse realities of the urban phenomenon. While in Asia it describes a context that is characterized by poverty and urbanization, in Europe there is interest about the conditions of the built environment and its projection in the communities. In North and South America meanwhile, we find a presence of the market and the urban context. This means that the concept developed is conceptualized as ambiguous in the literature (Komez-Daglioglu, 2016). Said contradiction is not just a matter of scientific production, but also about the way ideas circulate and how these are imposed on knowledge.

Another one of the premises that can be taken from the results obtained from the sample is that placed knowledge is obliterated by the hegemony of the scientific visibility that exists in the databases, like Web of Science and Scopus, in the international scientific area. We are aware that, on using the WoS database, we expose ourselves to results that will only display the topics, concepts, theories, methodologies, that emerge from the places that produce them. However, it is also seen that the literature that has served as reference (See Table N°3 and 5) of the urban context, comes from thinkers that have written from western positions. Although the contributions of relevant figures to understand the city and its contexts, like Jane Jacobs (2011), Kevin Lynch (2015), Charles Moore (1977), among others that stand out, who have been pillars for architecture and urban studies, we must localize their contributions from a knowledge of the “north”, that has maintained the predominance of the industrial and post-industrial city, over the multi-colored Latin American city (Rama, 1984).

Finally, it is prudent to say that the components of the context are not all the variables that surround the phenomenon in question, but rather the context comprises those aspects one decides to pay attention to. There is a decision focused on the

selection of some elements. In this way, the factors that affect the context will also depend on the choices made. Finally, the fact of having an etymological origin in a fabric, shows the close relationship between language, as a builder of realities, and the way in which the contemporary world is examined and, from this, it is also built under theoretical models that explain reality, but also subject to the constant discussion and answer of these.

VI. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The debate on urban context cannot be settled here. This bibliometric analysis is just a contribution to open the discussion in Social Sciences in general, and in the areas that handle space and its dynamics, in particular. The use of a database like Web of Science (WoS) is not a variable that allows us to identify all the totalizing logics of this term in scientific production in general. However, it is just a door that can open to the debate of “urban context” as an important variable for future research and projects about the space of the city. Apart from this, it can be a starting point to establish similar methodologies to review the literature that involves the “urban context” in Latin American scientific production.

The urban context, based on the results obtained, has seen an increase in its use, but not with the goal of reflecting about this, but as a concept that epistemologically builds a reality that has been intensified over the last 40 years: urbanization. Based on these processes, which have had different expressions in the world, this concept is related with the consequences that urbanization generates in the urban space on continents like Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Considering this, the keywords that accompany the urban context can be really varied and range from regeneration to planning, mobility, ethnicity, even social polarization, climate, race, neighborhood, housing, public space, consumption, tourism, among many others. And it seems that its impact increased in scientific production with the start of the 21st century. Ultimately, its range shows that the ambiguity and emptiness of the concept have led to it being used in association with different urban and social processes.

The construction of a reflection that helps us configure a useful urban context for its application in our cities is key. This, leaving side the views that have served to theoretically build this concept and that come from the 1960s and do not exactly arise from our Latin and urban realities. At first glance, it is possible to note works that go in this direction (García, Carrasco & Rojas, 2014), but it is necessary to delve deeper in this discussion and to establish theories, methodologies, ontologies and results that integrate flexible views about urban context. The scopes of these considerations try to confirm that, on analyzing the literature, specifically one concept, it is possible to start to question the ways in which we have been using terms that are constantly appropriated and redefined, but also, start questioning our own ways of approaching science and to not just continue accumulating terms that have been emptied for the scientific community and even more so for the society in general.

Traducido por Kevin Wright/ Translated by Kevin Wright

Cluster N°	Keywords' co-occurrence
1	China, discourse, education, ethnicity, growth, housing, knowledge, mobility, policies, poverty, privatization, religion, urban context, urban space, urbanization, youth.
2	Community, consumption, design, environment, experience, health, landscape, model, nature, planning, regeneration, space, tourism, UK
3	Disadvantages, identity, incomes, neighborhoods, perspectives, race, students, urban, urban education
4	Chile, climate change, gender, history, market, modernity, perception, public space, smart city, United States
5	Cities, democracy, energy, governance, participation, strategies, system, urban design, urban development
6	Gentrification, globalization, London, networks, place, social polarization, sociology, state, urban development, urbanism

Table N°4 – Co-occurrence of keywords (clusters)

Source: Own preparation.