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Spaces of transition: Young people's social practices in Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain)

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Abstract

Within the context of the growing interest in the study of young people in urban environments, the present article examines their relational spaces in a southern European city: Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain) – with a view to identifying the places they frequent and establishing whether or not the most widely-used ones form a spatial network offering them different recreational opportunities. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the paper explores the social practices of young people. The information obtained reveals the significance of open public spaces and shopping malls for young people generally, although differences are seen in their practices according to age, gender and social background. The results also suggest that, in the routes they take and their stays in the aforementioned places, young people create a network of meeting spaces that owes more to the construction of their identity than to the existence of complementary formulas for recreation.

Zusammenfassung

Im Kontext des wachsenden Interesses an der Erforschung von Jugendlichen und urbanen Räumen des Alltagslebens analysiert dieser Artikel von Jugendlichen frequentierte Treffpunkte in einer südeuropäischen Stadt: Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Kanarische Inseln, Spanien). Ziel ist es herauszufinden, welche Orte oft aufgesucht werden und ob die am häufigsten benutzten für die Jugendlichen ein Raumgeflecht formen, das ihnen andere, zusätzliche Möglichkeiten bietet. Durch die Kombination quantitativer und qualitativer Techniken wird ermittelt, welche sozialen Praktiken diese Altersgruppe hat. Die erhaltenen Informationen zeigen den hohen Stellenwert, den Treffpunkte (öffentliche Räume und Einkaufszentren) für alle Jugendlichen haben, obwohl sich ihre Praktiken nach Alter, Geschlecht und den sozialen Hintergrund unterscheiden. Die Ergebnisse lassen zudem darauf schließen, dass die Jugendlichen auf ihren Wegen und durch das Verweilen an den vorher genannten Orten ein Netz von Begegnungsorten ziehen, das eher in Zusammenhang mit der Entwicklung persönlicher Identität zu sehen ist, als mit der Suche nach zusätzlichen Möglichkeiten der Freizeitbeschäftigung.

Keywords Young people, social practices, relational spaces, Spain

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1. Introduction

Research on the behaviour of children, adolescents and young people has produced a sizeable body of knowledge within the social sciences since the latter decades of the 20th century. In the specific case of geography, theoretical and empirical studies which have dealt with these three groups using different perspectives and approaches share the view that knowledge of the behaviour patterns and opinions of adults is insufficient to explain the functioning of everyday life spaces. The patterns and experiences of children, adolescents and young people also need to be identified. Younger generations have been described as an essential part of “urban spatialities”, yet their presence has been largely overlooked in academic works (Travlou 2003, Skelton and Gough 2013) and, where they have been addressed, the meanings and roles they attribute to the places they frequent have been disregarded (Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000). Even less attention has been paid to the study of adolescents who have remained “invisible” even in geographies of childhood (Matthews et al. 1998, Vanderstede 2011). Similarly, despite the growing attention to diversity, the interests of young people and other groups are not always taken into account in planning practice, even though these groups colonise certain urban sectors as they seek to create their own identity (Lees 2003). Consequently, an understanding of how the lives of young people are constrained by adult-oriented “conceived space” and of how they produce their own space is warranted (Valentine 2003). In this regard, the study of young people's social practices constitute a “good way to get to know the city they help create” (Ortiz Guitart et al. 2014: 38). With that in mind, this article incorporates an intersectional approach, diverging from the notion of young people as a “monolithic” group (Valentine 2000). It aims to contribute to the debate by focusing on adolescents and identifying how this group produces its own space, in this case in a city in southern Europe, where studies of this nature remain few and far between.

Using quantitative and qualitative evidence collected through questionnaires, group interviews and non-participant observation, the present work pursues a two-fold objective. The first is to identify the relational spaces of young people in the centre of the city of Santa Cruz according to their age, gender and social background. The second is to verify whether or not the most frequented spaces configure a system of places offering them different and/or complementary recre-

ational possibilities. The article is divided into three sections. The first offers a brief review evidencing the interest held by the study of young people and sets out some theoretical arguments underpinning the empirical analysis carried out. The second characterises the study area, research subjects and methodological procedures used. The third section presents the results concerning the study of the spaces frequented by young people, the reasons for their preferences according to personal characteristics, and the functional network formed by the relational spaces. Finally, the main conclusions of the study will be summarised.

2. Young people and relational spaces

Research on the significance of everyday relational spaces for urban residents includes studies that deal with young people and adolescents from different analytical perspectives. The pioneering works in the 1970s by Kevin Lynch, Colin Ward and Roger Hart (Travlou 2003) on the experiences of young people in the city have been followed by new lines of research focused on other aspects ranging from the diverse identities embraced by the concepts of youth and young people to the difficulties entailed in demarcating these concepts appropriately and the need for an intersectional perspective to analyse their spatial practices, given that – as socially constructed categories – youth and adolescence are not defined solely in terms of time or as mere stages in life but also in terms of spaces (Danic 2012).

Despite being among the most frequent users of urban places like plazas, parks, shopping malls or sports centres, young people have been largely overlooked in academic works that seek to understand the city (Skelton and Gough 2013). However, they have attracted interest on the part of diverse social sciences, among them geography, which has produced a considerable body of research analysing children and young people as social actors (Evans 2008). Geographers have also underscored the importance of place in the configuration of the different global conceptions of infancy, adolescence and youth (Holloway and Valentine 2005). At the urban level, the role of public spaces and streets in the construction of their identities has also been highlighted (Langevang 2008). Such places are lived spaces – as well as spaces of contestation and renegotiation – due to young people's repeated contact and encounters with others, i.e. through their social practices (Vaïou and Ka-

landides 2009). Moreover, streets and public spaces continue to be an important part of everyday life for many young people and are often the only spaces in which they have autonomy and which they can shape for themselves (Matthews et al. 2000b).

It is no surprise, therefore, that one way of analysing the significance of young people in urban contexts has been to identify their preferred relational spaces – fourth environment (Matthews et al. 2000b), street-frequenting (Robinson 2000), meeting spaces (Gough and Franch 2005) – since this knowledge affords crucial information on their social practices, that is, how young people and adolescents develop their social skills; the ways they use and perceive the places where they practise these skills and where, as users, they exercise spontaneous appropriation according to their identification with them (Lefebvre 1991). In this regard, an increasing number of studies underline the importance of age, in addition to gender, as a category that also helps explain the functioning of present-day cities. It is worth recalling that the ways in which children, adults and the elderly experience their lives vary according to other social characteristics – some of which intersect significantly with age, other less so – and hence the experiences of people in each age group are diverse and heterogeneous (Hopkins and Pain 2007). For this reason, the need to compartmentalise research on age even further by treating young people as a separate category to children given their different spatial experiences and needs has been emphasised (Evans 2008).

Various critical studies have followed the line of research opened up by Henri Lefebvre in the 1960s on the right to the city. Some focus on the right of young people to the city (Borja 2011) and argue that, from a functional perspective, public spaces must accommodate everyone. However, certain hegemonic conducts – by adults, for example – lead to the exclusion of those with different identities, viewing them as “out of the norm”, and thus determine who is in and out of place (Valentine 2007). Clearly, the use and enjoyment of certain public spaces can be restricted by formal and informal exclusive appropriation processes. Depending on their perception of the users of public spaces and how the spaces are used, young people will be more or less inclined to frequent them. They feel “insecure” in territories they perceive to be the “exclusive” domains of others whom they consider “strangers”. As a result, they seek out relational spaces where they can “stay out of trouble” (Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000).

Beyond the fears concerning the use of certain spaces, from a gender perspective differences are seen between the sexes in the open-space behaviour of young people and adolescents, reflecting established social rules (Harth 2007). According to perceived cultural norms concerning what can be done and what should be avoided, girls have different ways of perceiving, experiencing and behaving. In addition to age and gender, an understanding of the behaviours of adolescents and young people requires consideration of other individual and cultural circumstances also, including social background (Valentine 2007, Shildrick et al. 2009). From this perspective, the shared interests of peers influence their social practices and spatial behaviour, which helps explain why the same space can be highly valued and frequented by some groups yet avoided by others. In this regard, intersectionality – an approach of particular relevance in gender studies but also in studies that focus on ethnic or marginalised groups – has proven useful as an appropriate analysis tool for understanding the identity and exclusion of certain groups (Nash 2008).

In sum, young people and adolescents are important actors in relational spaces and, generally, in cities (Skelton and Gough 2013). The work presented here on young people and their relational spaces in Santa Cruz de Tenerife draws to a large extent on investigations of the use, practices, values and significances of spaces of this kind for young people and adolescents in their everyday lives (Valentine 2000, Travlou 2004, Gough and Franch 2005, Mäkinen and Tyrväinen 2008). It examines also whether or not they frequent different spaces, i.e. whether in their free time they habitually use, in succession, different places that fulfil complementary functions. The aim is to verify the possible existence of a spatial network comprising the routes taken and spaces frequented. In this way the study factors into the analysis the notion that the spaces in question offer “contents that may meet different motivations and user profiles” (Travlou 2004, García García 2011: 287).

3. Area, study subjects and methods

The urban centre of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, a port and commercial city which is the capital of the island of Tenerife and has a population of slightly more than 200,000, was chosen for the study. The centre, which is compact and relatively small in size, boasts a wide and varied range of squares, parks, boulevards and

tree-lined avenues. It is also the institutional, administrative, cultural and commercial heart of the city. This central urban space is surrounded by a diversity of outlying districts, ranging from upmarket garden cities populated by the middle and upper classes to sprawling working-class social housing estates with high-rise blocks. The distances separating the outlying districts and the centre are small enough to be walkable, the journey taking between 25 and 40 minutes. Many young people choose to walk as a way of passing their leisure time, while others prefer to take public transport due to the steep slopes that need to be negotiated.

The study subjects – young people and adolescents – constitute a category with imprecise temporal contours, with definitions varying considerably depending on the social, economic or cultural context. In fact, individuals with ages ranging from 12 to 29 have featured in some research under both headings (*Revilla Castro* 2001). The present work investigates the habits and experiences of young people between the ages of 15 and 20 of both sexes, with a similar proportion of each sex chosen for the study. Due to their age and other aspects of their personal development, seven out of ten fall within the ambiguous category of adolescent. With increased age, the places where they prefer to hang out with friends change and their behaviour in this respect is more typical of young adults than adolescents. This is the case of subjects aged 17-20.

In addition to age, they have other features in common that help define their profile: all attend secondary schools; none is in employment of any form; and all live at home with their families. The majority (95 %) live in the city, albeit in areas with very different socioeconomic characteristics: half live in city-centre districts, while 45 % live in peripheral working-class estates. The choice of schools for the study¹ was based on the desire to obtain, presumably, different socioeconomic profiles depending on the type of school. The data analysis confirmed that the areas where the students live mainly did prove to be different: most of those attending the semi-private school live in central districts of the city while the students attending the state school live mainly in the working class periphery.

The importance of the techniques and locations used to study the social practices of young people has been highlighted by various authors (*Anderson and Jones* 2009). In our case, a combined methodology comprising, on the one hand, non-participant observation in urban spaces and, on the other hand, the completion of

a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with small classroom groups was used to obtain information on the social practices of the study group. The procedure followed for the observations, subject selection and information gathering was similar to that used in analogous research (*Mäkinen and Tyrväinen* 2008, *García Herrera et al.* 2013, *Ortiz Guitart et al.* 2014). The study commenced with the distribution of a questionnaire during the early months of 2014. A total of 105 responses were received, 52 from boys and 53 from girls. The questionnaire contained 40 questions aimed at eliciting information on the three basic issues forming the focus of the research:

- Which places are most frequented by young people and adolescents in the city of Santa Cruz de Tenerife? Questions related to formal and social attributes, as well as the activities undertaken and with whom they are undertaken.
- How do personal characteristics – age, gender and social background² – influence social practices? These three categories are cross-referenced with the places frequented by the young people and with the social practices undertaken there to identify possible similarities and differences in behaviour.
- Do the frequented places fulfil complementary recreational functions? The aim here was to investigate whether or not the young people perceived that the places frequented fulfilled different entertainment expectations.

Once this initial information was gathered, a qualitative methodology consisting of non-participant observation and group interviews was applied. The former enabled the basic characteristics (age and gender) of all users, including young people and adolescents, to be identified, along with the activities undertaken in the spaces (relaxing, chatting, talking by phone, playing, strolling, cycling etc.). For their part, the group interviews were used to capture “discursive geographies” (*Abbott-Chapman and Robertson* 2012), namely, the subjects’ opinions and perceptions with respect to their social and spatial practices. To that end, two interview sessions were organised in May 2014 in each school, one for males and one for females, in both cases with groups of 5-6 students. The sessions lasted for half an hour and the comments and opinions of a total of 22 students (11 per school) were recorded with their consent. The transcriptions were used to perform a

content analysis based on the model proposed by *Mayring* (2000) and the basic research questions explored earlier through the questionnaire. The results of the analysis (non-participant observation, questionnaire and interviews) are set out in the section that follows.

4. Results: differentiated social practices in relational spaces

The results offered below give some idea of the relational spaces frequented by young people in the city of Santa Cruz de Tenerife and the reasons underlying their choices, which reflect their varied spatial practices according to age, gender and social background. The places used by young people in their leisure time vary greatly, as do their social practices. In their responses concerning how they spend their free time, the students mention activities that entail the use of very different spaces.

These spaces are not necessarily outside the home, since one way of occupying free time is to stay at

home. In contrast to the empirical results from other research which note gender differences in the sense that female adolescents tend to stay at home more (*Abbott and Robertson* 2012), in Santa Cruz de Tenerife this option finds similar favour among both males and females (65 and 62 % respectively). It is a form of entertainment that owes more to current modes of computer-based amusement and communication than to safety concerns. "I prefer to stay at home rather than go out because what I like most is to play videogames. If I had to go somewhere it would be to a friend's house to be together. If we can't do that, we chat by computer" (interview with *Nacho*). A clear gender bias in favour of males (90 % vs. 60 %) is seen, however, in the case of sport, as is acknowledged by the girls in stating that "the boys probably go more to sports centres" (interview with *Laura*).

Young people attach importance to other activities also, in particular meeting up in open public spaces and visiting shopping centres. The significance of these spaces as relational environments has already

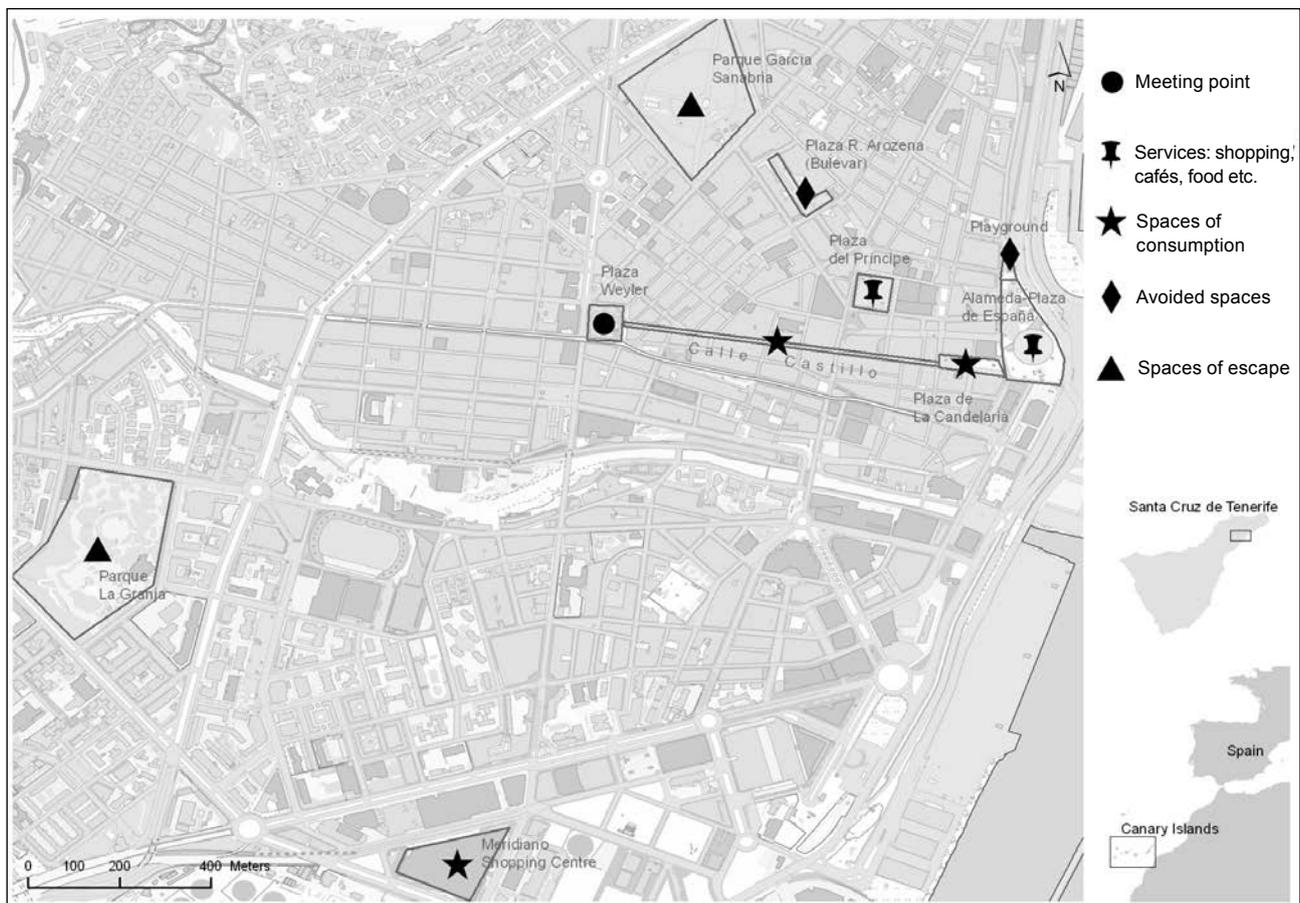


Fig. 1 Young people and adolescents' spatial network in the centre of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (authors' compilation, based on Grafcan 2011)

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been highlighted in other empirical studies (Matthews et al. 1998). The use of outdoor public spaces is similar among males and females (60 and 65 % respectively), whereas gender differences in favour of girls are seen in the case of shopping malls (70 % vs. 50 %).

From the responses given, five public spaces in the old part of the city centre and one major indoor shopping mall stand out among the preferences expressed. These five spaces are the area comprising the Alameda-Plaza España and its extension along the Plaza de La Candelaria; Calle de El Castillo; Plaza Weyler; and the García Sanabria and La Granja parks. The mall in question is the Meridiano Shopping Centre (Fig. 1).

Recent renovations to the seafront boulevard known as the Alameda del Duque de Santa Elena and to the adjoining Plaza de España and Plaza de La Candelaria have brought new access possibilities for young people and adolescents. The Alameda (colloquially called the "plain" by these age groups) and the Plaza de España (the "dome" or "pond") are particularly popular in the evening and at night (see Photo 1). Here the groups engage in diverse social practices such as sitting and chatting at the edge of the artificial lake or

skating on the "plain" section of the Alameda. However, they avoid the sector with the children's play area (non-participant observation). The well-known and much-used Plaza de La Candelaria is identified by many as the home of McDonalds and is therefore a space associated in young people's minds with consumerism, as well as being a transition point en route to other spaces: "we don't go there as it only has four benches to sit on; it is a square where a stage is built for an event and that's about it, a place to meet up [...] when I'm there I buy a slushie from the stall or from McDonalds and sit with my friends to chat, listen to music, take photos ..." (interview with *Patricia*).

The Calle Castillo pedestrian shopping street in the city centre is more than a place of transit for young people. Visits here constitute in themselves a form of leisure, associated on occasions with consumerism. In addition to its commercial attractiveness, this lively street connects the public spaces on the city seafront with the Plaza Weyler, a small historic square at the intersection of several major roads, a circumstance that makes it a popular meeting point. This is a key attribute for young people, who single it out as a "meet-up spot" because it is "central, well-known and easy to get to".



Photo 1 Group of adolescents hanging out on a Friday evening between the artificial lake – the "pond" – and the monument to war victims – the "dome" – on the renovated Plaza de España

The responses reveal that most young people of both sexes have integrated the different public spaces into their leisure-time routes. When asked about their routes they state that a common way of moving around the city and passing the time is to walk from one place to another. However, the network formed by their routes and stays does not appear to be a clear indication that the spaces in question offer them alternative recreation formulas. This spatial transit is merely a further way for them to construct their personal identity (Robinson 2000): “[...] if I arrange to meet up at the Plaza Weyler, I head down Calle Castillo to browse the shops. After that I head for McDonalds and, from there, maybe sit on a bench somewhere [...] then down to the Plaza de España, and from there to the “plain” (the Alameda) and perhaps on to the Bulevar shopping centre and Garcia Sanabria Park. I’m always on the move” (interview with *Clara*).

Other much-frequented spaces include the city’s two main parks: one (García Sanabria) located in an upper middle class area in the centre and the other (La Granja) on the edge of the working class periphery, in a densely populated and more socially diverse zone. Broadly-speaking, given their size and the fact that they are not aimed at a specific public, both parks are shared and inclusive spaces, where young people feel

comfortable. The reasons they put forward for using them include the following: “it is big enough for you to do some exercise”; “you can walk or skate around it comfortably”; “peace and quiet”; “you can hang out with a big group of friends”; “there is a lot of greenery”. The parks are therefore spaces for escapism, recreation and socialising (see *Photo 2*).

The Plaza del Principe and Plaza de R. Arozena Paredes (commonly known as the “Bulevar”) are also listed among the public spaces mentioned by young people and adolescents, albeit a long way behind those referred to above. The first is a peaceful spot in the very heart of the city centre and attracts a wide mix of users. Young people tend to be in the minority during the week but their presence increases noticeably in the evenings at week-ends, when more intimate behaviour is feasible (non-participant observation). The nearby Plaza Bulevar is a large forecourt in front of the shopping centre of the same name and was built at the end of the 20th century. The combination of pavement cafés and a children’s play area makes for a lively atmosphere in the evenings, particularly at week-ends, although this circumstance generates differing opinions among user groups. Many young people, especially the older ones, say they do not like going there “because there are so many kids”. These mani-



Photo 2 Adolescents on the grass in the La Granja Park on a Saturday afternoon

festations are made by girls and boys aged 17 and over in asserting an identity different to that of teenagers and children. The diverse forms of experiencing the same place indicate that spaces associated with certain age groups, in this case adults and children, influence who uses them and how they are used. This helps explain why older young people tend to seek out their own relational territories (Hopkins and Pain 2007).

During the course of our research, it emerged that young people in Santa Cruz show a preference for centrally-located public spaces, regardless of where they actually live. Friendships determine the spaces they visit, although a further factor is the insecurity they experience in their home neighbourhoods due to the presence of other users who make them feel unsafe. This is true of a number of public spaces in the urban periphery, which are located in places with little or no activity and few people in the streets. Moreover, they are often isolated or are poorly connected to surrounding parts, badly maintained and with very few amenities (Madanipour 2010). Coupled with the presence of vagrants, these characteristics trigger impressions denoting a perception of danger or threat: "[...] I am scared to go out at night because ... you are taking a risk being out the threat 10 pm, without protection or anything of the kind ..." (interview with Roberto). Variations of the same idea are expressed by others also in their references to "poor street lighting" or to the use of the spaces by homeless people and drug addicts: "there are loads of squatters who deal in drugs" (interview with Francisco); [...] "it is full of people I don't like [...] I have no desire to be with drunks, there are lots of crazy people there" (interview with Martina).

In seeking meeting places where they feel more comfortable, young people follow routes that become a habitual part of their social practices and are interpreted as "an intrinsic part of being young" (Langevang and Gough 2009): "It's fun and enjoyable. When I go alone it seems a lot longer time-wise. When I go with them it takes longer but (I think) seems shorter, I'm not sure" (interview with Marta).

Shopping malls deserve separate mention on account of their importance as meeting venues. These giant "privatised leisure" centres convey also the notion of security and absence of conflict and therefore lend themselves to frequentation, albeit in different ways depending on young people's real or potential consumption capacities (Matthews et al. 2000a, Karsten 2002). Although the success of these "non-places"

has been linked to a broad range of motivations, not just those associated with consumerist values (Sweeting et al. 2012); in this case the combination of different leisure and consumption options makes them particularly attractive to young people: "[...] I tend to hang out in shopping malls. I go mainly because of the many things you can do there, such as have a bite with friends, see a film, [...], we go to videogame and electronics shops and the like, [...], you can't do all that if you are walking around the streets [...]" (interview with Álvaro). Girls are very clear when asked where they prefer to spend their free time. Regardless of the school attended, the majority are in no doubt: "if possible, in the shopping malls of course!" (interview with Beatriz). When asked about what spaces they would miss most in the city, they single out "the Meridiano" (shopping centre) and "Calle Castillo". Conversely, from their replies it appears that they would have no problem if they had to do without the Plaza de España.

In sum, in their free time the young people and adolescents of Santa Cruz de Tenerife meet and socialise primarily in the main central public spaces and big shopping malls. While the public spaces are used to a similar degree by both girls and boys, the shopping malls are preferred mainly by the former. The manner in which young people and adolescents distribute their free time suggests that they use outdoor and indoor public spaces indiscriminately. From the opinions they express, their relational spaces fall into different categories, each with different meanings: the meeting point for their routes through the city is situated on the edge of the urban centre, the Plaza Weyler; for escapism, they choose the parks – García Sanabria and La Granja – where they can meet up with friends in large numbers and engage in a range of activities; to hang out for relatively long periods, especially in late evening and at night, they choose the main open public spaces in the old part of the city – the Alameda, Plaza de España, Plaza del Príncipe; various consumerism-linked spaces – the Calle Castillo, Plaza de La Candelaria and shopping malls – are also frequented; squares and parks in the periphery are avoided as are spaces occupied by users with whom the young people feel no identification – the Bulevar and the children's play area in the Alameda. However, these categories are not exclusive given that the social practices vary in time and space, with shared frequentation and use evident in many cases: "[...] I go to the Plaza del Príncipe more ... but always end up coming here ... it's our meeting up point [Plaza de España], although we change it about. We meet here and then maybe head

up Calle Castillo to look at the shops ... it depends" (interview with *Carolina*).

Lastly, social background is manifested in certain aspects related to the time devoted to everyday activities and the places where these activities take place. Leisure time differences are seen between the students attending the state school and its semi-private counterpart. In the case of the latter, extra classes and out-of-school activities tend to result in a longer school day during the week, meaning that leisure time is concentrated at week-ends: "I go out more at week-ends because I have to study during the week" (interview with *Carolina*). Adolescents attending the semi-private school opt for shopping centres to socialise and this usually includes consumption of some form: "[...] When I head out with my friends I usually follow the same route. First to the cinema and after the film we get a bite to eat in one of the fast-food places. We check out the videogame shops in the Meridiano and then head over to the Saturn shopping centre, where there are more videogame shops [...] we chat about what we have been doing during the week because we don't get out very often then. When we do go out it is usually a Friday" (interview with *Álvaro*). In fact, these students do not identify the open public spaces in the old part of the city as their preferred places and they give various reasons for this, foremost among them the presence of groups of young people with whom they feel no affinity and who inspire a sense of fear in them: "[...] the Plaza de España, the far end, is full of hoodlums and the like. They look at you like that and robbed a friend of mine. You can't do anything because they are bigger and stronger ... they are always older, stuff like that [...]" (interview with *Arturo*).

Even if they also frequent shopping centres, male students from the state school tend to prefer open spaces, at least that is the most common opinion expressed by the interviewees: "[...] especially for the atmosphere and because it is quiet. When you go to a shopping centre it is full of people, it's all very hectic. There [in the squares] you can sit on a bench or somewhere, buy crisps to eat and sit and chat" (interview with *Fernando*).

These and other expressions regarding the motivations for using or not using certain places and the perceptions voiced would appear to indicate – as other case studies have shown – that the choice of spaces where young people spend their free time in Santa Cruz de Tenerife is influenced not only by age and gender but also by the affinity that comes

with belonging to similar socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, each group tends to generate singular spaces that are modelled by their microcultures (*Travlou et al. 2008*).

4. Conclusions

This paper highlights the need to know how other groups, different from adults, help to build urban spatialities. The examination of the leisure-time social practices of young people offered here contributes to our knowledge of a group that, together with middle-aged adults, tends to be overlooked in such studies, which focus more on children and older people. Thus, analysing the role of young people and adolescents in the functioning of everyday life spaces we contribute to make these groups visible.

First, the research points to the significance of specific places, such as public spaces and shopping malls, for the aforementioned collective in their search of autonomy and identity.

Large shopping malls have been proved to be highly valued by young people and therefore occupy an important place for them. Our results show that young people and adolescents in Santa Cruz de Tenerife prefer in general big shopping malls and open public spaces in the city centre for their social practices. From an intersectional approach the major role played by categories of age, gender and social background in the most frequented spaces is established. Concerning the use of specific places, young people's behaviour reveals the intersection of cultural values and social background, as expressed in their valuation of some open public spaces. Gender differences in favour of shopping malls is another case in point. Adolescent male and female students from the semi-private school and older females from the state school express a clear preference for such malls, whereas older males from the state school prefer open public spaces. Therefore the article also raises new questions concerning the reproduction of inherited cultural models by young people and adolescents in their use of relational spaces.

Second, such as other works, our findings also point to that young people build, through their social practices, a network of spaces of transition; through their routes and stays they establish links related more to their identities than to the complementary contents of

those spaces. Thus we find, in the case of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, that moving between the various public spaces, and between these and the shopping malls, to say hanging out, is a common form for adolescents of both sexes to share their leisure time with their friends. The attractiveness of the open public spaces, besides their central location, is that they form a relatively large and varied network of spaces situated in close proximity to each other. However, the key to success appears to be the actual existence of the network rather than the attributes of each of its component spaces.

The results suggest further that ties of friendship account for the relational spaces frequented, although it has emerged also that young people and adolescents of both sexes from the peripheral working-class estates view the public spaces nearest their homes as places to avoid since they are perceived to be the territory of groups that represent some degree of threat to them. The study lends further weight to works that identify young people as an age group that is particularly sensitive to these issues. Lastly, it helps highlight further the erroneous consideration of "youth" as a homogeneous category when, in fact, they present singular attributes that need to be taken into account by planners in the design of urban public spaces.

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Notes

¹ One (Andrés Bello Secondary School, 48 students selected) is a state school and the other (La Salle San Ildefonso School, 57 students selected) is semi-private, receiving financial support from the government.

² Place of residence is used as an indirect indicator of social background. The fact that most of the students attending the state secondary school live in the working-class periphery is important as these districts have the highest unemployment, highest proportion of precarious jobs and the highest number of people without schooling, as well as the highest number of homes with poor living conditions and the highest poverty indicators in the city. These circumstances have led the majority of the districts to be classified as "vulnerable urban areas" (Ministerio de Fomento 2011). The interviews confirm the usefulness of place of residence as a proxy for social background.

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