



Leisure Space and Quality of Life. An Approach to Their Relationship: The Case of Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Abstract

From a geographical point of view, the scientific approach to leisure space is still emerging in connection with its incorporation and significance within the range of values characteristic of postmodern society. In turn, evaluations on quality of life of the population have barely advanced with respect to leisure as to other traditional dimensions. In this sense, we find fertile grounds on which we can contribute to the construction of knowledge about the overall treatment of leisure space and quality of life.

For these reasons, this chapter presents the state of the art of the geographical study corresponding to leisure space and quality of life, seeking to investigate afterwards the possibilities of its overall application in the empirical field. To do so, bibliographical review and critical analysis of specialized literature were applied as methodology. Secondly, this chapter inquires on the territorial imbalances which can be perceived as the product of cartographic overlapping spaces characterized by holding a unique predisposition towards the

functionality of leisure (public green areas and shopping streets) and levels of quality of life, at the same time relating to the rates of population growth. Mar del Plata was selected as a study area, a city located in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The information employed came from secondary sources provided by the national census carried out in 2010 by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) as well as data provided by the municipality of the General Pueyrredon district.

13.1 Introduction

Although within the set of issues addressed by Geography, leisure concern is of recent introduction, it is possible to refer to a strengthened core of researchers engaged and worried about the study of the significance of leisure practices in relation to the territory.¹ By way of example, the growing theoretical and empirical approach to concepts such as touristification (Lanfant 1995 in Hiernaux 2000), aestheticization/thematization of space (Bertoncello and Iuso 2016) or commercial gentrification (del Romero Reanu and Martín 2015), i.e. a whole set of processes of geographi-

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¹Santos (2000), Elissalde (2007) and Blanco (2007), among many other authors.

cal nature, serves to position leisure as a contemporary phenomenon that gradually seems to gain ground within the cities and, but of course at uneven pace, rural areas.

Once the existence of this kind of processes is recognized and accepted, what concerns this chapter is linking leisure with quality of life from a territorial point of view. To do this, we start by expressing that we are working with core concepts that are of a certain level of complexity, since around the notions of territory; leisure and quality of life are growing deep debates that allow ensuring that there is not a single theoretical approach to their definition.

Generally in assessments of quality of life in Argentina, leisure has not been mostly considered as a dimension of analysis. This situation contrasts with the estimates carried out in places such as the European Union, where recent surveys have already provided the hierarchy of independent domain to topics such as sports and cultural facilities, public space and green areas.

Moreover, the establishment of indicators relating to the well-being of the population has expressly focused on dimensions such as health, education, housing, environment and employment, though some socio-spatial indicators, able to allow an approximate reading to the territorial leisure space distribution, have been incorporated. In this sense, we find fertile ground on which to contribute to the construction of knowledge with respect to an overall treatment of leisure space and quality of life. For this reason, the first objective of this chapter is to present the state of the art of the geographical study corresponding to both concepts, attempting to investigate afterwards their possibilities for application in the empirical field. To do so, bibliographical review and critical analysis of specialized literature will be applied as methodology.

The needs or requirements in the field of leisure and recreation vary according to socio-demographic variables such as age and socio-economic level and, at the same time, quality of life conditions and is conditioned by the socio-demographic dynamics of places. Therefore, a second objective will inquire on the territorial imbalances that are evident in a particular area based on the

overlay mapping of types of leisure spaces and levels of quality of life, whereas at the same time the evolution of the rhythms of growth of the population will be considered. To this purpose, the city of Mar del Plata, a Aglomeración de Tamaño Intermedio Grande² (ATIG) (Velázquez 2008) has been selected as the area of study, which is located in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina and which, according to the census records carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) by the year 2010, congregated a total of 614,350 inhabitants.

The empirical study must be taken into account as the first step established towards a greater target, which is more related to the knowledge about leisure spaces contained in the city of Mar del Plata. In this sense, we start by analyzing the territorial distribution that some sites of the city acquire, being characterized by having a predisposition that is exclusive to the functionality of leisure, with the intention, in turn, to embrace both the Recreational Resources of a Natural Base as well as those Socially Constructed (Velázquez and Celemín 2013), more precisely public green spaces (parks and squares) and shopping streets.

This chapter is divided into six sections. In order to meet the first objective, literature review and documents analysis are carried out, thus attaining the construction of three different sections, where we proceed to: (1) highlight leisure as an object of study of Geography, (2) briefly introduce the guidelines linked to the concept of quality of life, and (3) join previous discussions from the reflection on the approach to leisure that is applied on the quality of life assessments in Argentina. To achieve the second objective, a quantitative methodology is employed, held on the use of secondary data from the 2010 Census, and information provided by the municipality of General Pueyrredón (the district to which Mar del Plata belongs) referred to the location of public green spaces and shopping streets. All this information has been systematized and opera-

²It means Great Intermediate Size Agglomerate, urban areas comprising between 400.000 and 999.999 inhabitants (Vapňarský and Gorojosky 1990 in Velázquez 2008).

tionalized in a free access and open source GIS environment (QGis), allowing the generation of thematic cartography. In this sense, the sections that remain are based on: (4) briefly characterizing the city of Mar del Plata as a notable case study in host location of practices of leisure at the national level, (5) detailing the techniques used for synthesis thematic mapping, and (6) specifically referring to the results achieved and provide an interpretation on the matter. Finally, we conclude with a series of end reflections and questions that encourage the continuity of this line of research.

13.2 Leisure and the Importance of Its Spatial Dimension

During the last decades, leisure has been installed as a field of innovative and multidisciplinary knowledge, as it refers to a concept in process of resignification (Pascucci 2012).

If the analysis of this term in historical perspective is recovered, one gets to the reflection about the existence of this social practice in each time and space where a group of people ever established. By way of example, we can firstly recall the period of classical Greece, where leisure was expressed in terms of ideals, i.e. a time of reflection and development of intellectual abilities only accessed by elites or free men (Gerlero 2005). Secondly, inside industrial capitalism, the use of this concept was assimilated with an immoral human condition, supposedly laziness and unproductivity (Elizalde 2010), and generated by the centrality granted to occupation in everyday life, and the consequent immersion of its original meaning with the developing notions of free time and recreation. However, despite this passage from a positive into a negative conception, it is well worth mentioning that, from this moment on, “leisure is no longer, as before, a privilege of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie” (Sue 1982: 35), but a mostly widespread social practice.

In this way, reassessment of leisure comes from the post-Fordist period, when such practices were recognized as constituents of a broad con-

cept of health aimed at the satisfaction of post-material needs (Caldwell and Smith 1988). However, the duality between conceiving it as mere consumption activity or as a holistic experience that includes physical, emotional and mental persists in current capitalism (Gerlero 2005; Cuenca Cabeza 2010). Nevertheless, and as it was already mentioned, this discussion is something relatively recent, since temporality and spatiality not intended for work has been undervalued by academia and barely explored from a scientific point of view for being (dis)qualified as trivial, frivolous or irrelevant matter (Hiernaux 2000; Gerlero 2005; Elizalde 2010; Azevedo Schirm Faria and Gomes 2013).

Although the interpretation of different definitions of leisure allow its appreciation as “a contribution and a vehicle for the improvement of the quality of life” (Pascucci 2012: 39), and has even been pointed out as its essence, since you enter in a positive, desirable and valued state of mind and, thus, conducive to happiness (Neulinger 1981 in Pascucci 2012), there is an important cluster of assertions which express different features of the concept. Among them, Gómez (1987) describes leisure as a growing phenomenon that includes not only the idea of tourism but also various other forms of use of free time; Hiernaux (2000) refers to a mode of organized use of free time that strengthens its presence in everyday life; Gomes (2004 and 2007), summarized by Elizalde (2010), conceives it as a social practice composed by four elements: (1) a time lived at the present time, (2) an appropriate space, (3) a cultural demonstration and (4) an attitude based on playfulness. Finally, Pascucci (2012) adds that it is a vital right and necessity related to desire, freedom of choice, motivation and enjoyment, reasons why it begins to be assumed as a responsibility of the public authority (Müller 2002) for “the achievement of complete human development” (Tonon and Rodríguez de la Vega 2016: 11).

Nonetheless, despite the fact that leisure is emerging within the set of valuations of the subjects, its incorporation in everyday life is a gradual process, which permeates with uneven pace to all social sectors. Taking this into account, it is understood that the upper-income groups can

more easily challenge the centrality of work in contemporary life, and undertake practices of leisure most frequently, which, in turn, are transformed into objects of desire for the rest of the society (García Ballesteros 1998). In this sense, it is worth recovering Hiernaux (2000) reflection, who specified that “the behavior of the upper classes have a decisive weight in the formation of the behaviors of other groups” (2000: 100).

What was stated in the previous paragraph leads to support the relationship between consumption and leisure (Karsten et al. 2015), since it cannot be ignored that leisure has also joined the logic of capitalism in the sector of tertiary activities (Egea Fernández 1993), or that part of it has been in the hands of the market and generated new forms of alienation (Elizalde 2010). This displays the most perverse side of the affair, which claims to understand that the growth of leisure also meets the structural need for a system that imposes “Rest to continue producing and have time for consumption” (Álvarez Sousa 1994: 40 in Gerlero 2005). On this basis, the purpose of leisure consumption transcends the objective of satisfying a need and reaches a symbolic value of social representation or social integration, for medium and low income sectors (Rosake and Ercolani 2014). Up to here the reflection about what Cuenca Cabeza (2006) designates as the negative directionality of leisure, understanding it as the possibility to be achieved as practices or experiences harmful to the individual or society. However, we want to address at leisure from its positive directionality, i.e. its ability to become reference of human development and contribute to the quality of life.

Apart from the characterization developed so far, it is also necessary to consider the contributions of those who conceive leisure close to the tourism concept. This is due to the adoption of a humanistic approach that assumes tourism as experience and not only as an economic activity. In this sense, not a few authors³ relativize the basic elements present in the classical definitions of tourism proposed by the World Tourism

Organization (WTO), as for example the fact of having to spend the night outside the area of habitual residence. In this regard, Azevedo Schirm Faria and Gomes (2013) recovered the thoughts of Lacerda (2007) and Souza (2011) to highlight the possibility of understanding tourism as a practice of leisure which must not necessarily be carried out in a distant place, but can also occur within the space of daily attendance from actions such as (re)knowledging of the local space and raising awareness about the milestones or heritage values present in the subjects’ city of residence and their areas of influence. In this way, the proximity between tourism and leisure develops from the activation of sensations traditionally linked with the tourist experience but in the everyday living space, implying strangeness, discovery, contemplation and recreation (Gastal and Moesch 2007 in Azevedo Schirm Faria and Gomes 2013).

Although Bertoncetto (2006) limited his analysis of the complexity of the contemporary tourist map to the case of Argentina, one could well state that the set of factors which he mentions refer to processes that go beyond the national level and relate to what has happened in Latin America. In this regard, issues such as the greater labor flexibility that afflicts the population since the 1990s, the prominent place given to recreational activities driven by the arrival of large companies and tourist proposals linked to local development, coupled with the trend towards the cultural and the alternative, have caused the fragmentation of leisure time and altered the classical practice of the summer resort linked to the concept of annual vacation. As a result, Bertoncetto (2006) notes that the territory has all through been transformed into potential leisure space, and exemplifies this process referring to the multiplication of tourist destinations in Argentina, which could be extended to a global scale.

In this way we approach the debate on the geographic or spatial dimension of leisure, noticing in the first instance the complexity that covers this subject in Latin America as a result of the coexistence of contradictory realities. By the one hand, “there is the proliferation of new parks, gardens, pedestrian and transit corridors not

³Lacerda (2007), Souza (2011), Azevedo Schirm Faria and Gomes (2013).

properly planned, which seem rather forced spaces belonging to another urban intervention and not to what the society of the sector in question demands” (Rendón Gutiérrez 2010: 12), and by the other hand, situations of abandonment, forgetting and neglect are demonstrated in pre-existing spaces of public leisure. Because of the above mentioned, it is argued that the revaluation of leisure is produced mainly in discursive or theoretical terms; since, in some urban management policies, it is observed that there is still a lack of awareness of the social value that these places contain (Müller 2002).

In line with the issues raised by Müller (*ibid.*), within the claims made by Latin American society to their governments, access to leisure is often found in a position downgraded with respect to other domains that make up quality of life (mainly housing,⁴ work, health and education). However, if the high rates of urbanization characteristic of this region are taken into account, access to leisure does not lose importance and emerges as a fundamental aspect to be considered in the management of cities. According to this scenario, it is highlighted that in certain territorial fragments at the local scale, or the lived space, an appreciation of leisure emerges, product of the existence of problems to access spaces for this purpose.

Inside the urban space, places that possess an innate predisposition to the functionality of leisure are found. Such is the case of the green public spaces (squares and parks) and certain commercial sites (customary streets downtown and large commercial centers), which are here mentioned because of its use in the empirical study that is presented in the following pages.

It is interesting to think in public green spaces as urban areas where one can better territorialize the leisure that García Ballesteros (2001) has qualified as “constructive”, i.e. not dependent of consumption and prone to relaxation, sociability

and personal development based in the possibility of putting into practice sports or artistic talents (biking, skate boarding, skating, painting, taking pictures). In this way, it is understood that, subject to a rightful land distribution, “the more green spaces in the city, the greater the quality of urban life” (Rendón Gutiérrez 2010: 12), since, in addition, they provide balance to some of the aggressive components that define the urban space, including noise and visual pollution (Gómez Lopera 2005). For these reasons, the European Union considers green spaces as one of their main indicators of urban sustainability, highlighting a minimum acceptable value of 9 m² of green area per capita, along with other international agencies such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

As regards commercial spaces, while in the first instance they direct to the idea of alienated and consumerist leisure (Elizalde 2010), their consideration in this study lies in their playful, recreational and amusement functions. It should be recognized that, today more than ever, to stroll along central streets and malls is one of the favorite pastimes of the urban population, reason why García Ballesteros (2001) emphasizes the need to differentiate the expression “going shopping” from “shopping”, while the latter refers to a duty that is not reasonably accepted as part of their leisure time. However, this doesn’t mean that after that the author confirms “the symbiosis between going shopping and shopping is growing” (2001: 269), since we are passing a period of great interdependence between the time devoted to duties or obligations, and the time for leisure. In relation to this last point, Geography demands having in mind that there is also a territorial arrangement for this to be so, since throughout time many customary commercial areas have acquired new structures that involve attractiveness and drive displacements with purposes of leisure (shopping malls, hypermarkets).

Beyond these spaces that predispose to universal leisure, the geographic perspective can be expanded if the production of culture is taken as a constituent element of the definition of leisure, without leaving it restricted only to passive experiences (Gomes et al. 2010 in Azevedo Schirm

⁴Despite this comparison, the author underlines the value of housing as one of nowadays main leisure environments, due to the fact that it is there that most of the free time is spent. Even more, if you consider the Latin American reality, since today families do not have the streets of the city to take advantage as a space for leisure because they offer danger and violence.

Faria and Gomes 2013). With this consideration, the aim is to highlight that establishments such as cultural centers, district clubs, schools of dance and music, and theatres, must also be presumed as spaces of leisure and, therefore, analyzed in pursuit of the scope of territorial distributions in line with the needs of the population. In addition, we must be able to understand that work and leisure activities not always oppose, since, as Elizalde discloses (2010) when criticizing the classic contribution of Dumazedier (1973), "(...) what happens if at work, for example, moments and spaces of leisure are generated, therefore incorporating a pleasant feeling of being at a chosen time?" (2010: 7). Evidently, such actions aiming at the improvement of quality of life turn the approach to leisure space more complex, as it overlaps with the workspace of other subjects. Thinking about carrying out any type of tourist excursion (for example to a vineyard, a theme or industrial park) serves as example to support this idea. The truth is, as García Ballesteros says (2001), the heterogeneity and dynamism that characterizes the social space of consumption currently makes territorial interpretation more difficult.

Finally, from the viewpoint of Geography, we can contribute to knowledge starting from the problematization of the idea commonly extended about leisure as "a time/space selected and freely chosen" (Elizalde 2010: 10), since the geographical space, through its load of materiality and symbology, participates in these decisions as determinant of everyday evolution (Santos 2000). In this sense, and as Müller announces: "the question of space greatly influences the attitude that people adopt against its leisure experience" (2002: 1). In-depth knowledge about territory can be helpful to understand if its structure and operation favor the development of a leisure space that really contributes to quality of life, i.e., to the release or dignity of persons, or if otherwise it reinforces the social inequalities that characterize urban spaces today.

13.3 Quality of Life

Quality of life in the words of Casas (1996), cited by Tonon (2007), is defined as:

perceptions, aspirations, needs, gratifications and social representations that members of every social group experience in relation to their environment and the social dynamics in which they are immersed, including the services they are offered and the social interventions for which they are eligible and which come from social policies. (2007: 143)

Quality of life is a theoretical category that arises in the second half of the twentieth century, and that is still controversial about its meaning and content (Tonon and Rodriguez de la Vega 2016; Pacione 2003; Schalock and Verdugo Alonso 2009; Veenhoven 2000).

Sirgy et al. (2006) developed a comprehensive publication where they discuss the past, present and future of quality of life on a global scale.

It is a concept that involves the experiences of the subjects in their everyday environment, their possibility of access to goods and services, and the skills they have to make use of the existing proposals on their territory, a notion tied to the social and cultural capital of the subjects. At the same time, Sen (1998) argues that

since we not only value well and satisfactorily living, but we also appreciate having control over our own lives, quality of life has to be judged not only by the way in which we end up living, but also for substantial alternatives that we have. (1998: 2)

Quality of life is a concept that reacts to consumption, standard of living and environmental deterioration. It categorizes the criterion of quality against quantity, in such sense, "it is a social and historical construction and at the same time behaves as a spatial dimension" (Feu 2005). While it has a clear referent, i.e., human needs in all its dimensions, the standard of living is limited to a quantitative abstraction whose sole purpose seems to be "being above".

Within specialized literature we often found at least two streams of authors that define quality of life from opposite ends (Leva 2005; Cummins 1998; Somarriba Arechavala and Zarzosa Espina 2016; Diener and Suh 1997).

A first group (...) adheres to a quantifiable, measurable, objective vision. They investigate a wide range of goods and services in the external environment of people, which should potentially be available to individuals to satisfy their tangible and intangible needs. The second group defends a qualitative, non-measurable and subjective position.

They emphasize the internal environment of people, concluding in exclusively perceptive happy or unhappy findings according to different dimensions of life, in general, and to goods and services, in particular. (Leva 2005: 14)

Although the objective questions are interpreted as a search for a set of goods and services provided by the built environment (housing, education, health and work), quality of life should also include the estimation and understanding of individuals and societies; here is where the subjective nature of the concept appears, a question that is not addressed in this work but must surely be taken into consideration.

Among Argentine geographers that have devoted to the study of quality of life, one of the main referents is Velázquez, who argues that quality of life

is a measure of achievement with respect to an optimal established level, taking into account socio-economic and environmental dimensions that are dependent on the scale of values prevailing in its society and which vary depending on the expectations of historical progress. (2001: 164)

When disentangling the components that make up this conceptualization, we can get to understand the reason for its recurrent inclusion in most of the *papers* reviewed, since this definition encompasses the main ideas that make up quality of life from the geographic discipline.

Firstly, Velázquez presents quality of life as a measure of achievement, assuming the evaluative nature of the concept (Lucero et al. 2008) and its difference from the notion of life condition, which refers to a descriptive approach, despite the fact that the persistence of synonymic treatment in certain everyday situations or in political and journalistic discourse continues. Secondly, the author says that quality of life is made up of socio-economic and environmental dimensions, also called domains, a fact that guarantees its status as a multidisciplinary study.

In its relationship with leisure, the contributions of Pascucci (2012) and Gómez Lopera (2005) must be highlighted. From positive psychology, the first author adheres to the idea of quality of life as the state of the subject that results from putting optimal experiences in oper-

ation, or allowing the development of personal skills and practices which radiate satisfaction, self-esteem and happiness. In this way, to have a good quality of life depends on the frequency with which people perform their most desired actions, within which are those accomplished during their leisure time. From architecture, Gómez Lopera (ibid.) notes that quality of life is a concept that “refers to an assessment of experience that subjects have of their own lives” (2005: 418).

13.4 Deciphering Leisure Inside the Argentine Indices of Quality of Life

The general development of the indices of quality of life shows the incorporation of new dimensions beyond the usual economic, educational and health related concerns. For example, from the 1970s and in line with the growing importance of ecological issues, different indicators that reflect the environmental context from the perception of individuals (subjective indicator) or from information provided by governmental agencies (objective indicators) have been incorporated (Celemín and Velázquez 2011).

In Argentina, numerous geographers have advanced with respect to the construction of urban and rural scale indices of quality of life (Velázquez 2001, 2008, 2016; Lucero et al. 2005, 2008, 2016; Celemín 2009; Mikkelsen 2007, 2016, among others), many of them demonstrating that the ranges of the data obtained in the elaborated indices show more heterogeneity within the cities, generating undisputed fragments of differentiation.

As has been announced in Velázquez et al. (2013), “Geography, quality of life and territorial fragmentation in Argentina” (Velázquez 2001) was one of the first books dealing with the problem of quality of life with a geographic spirit, comprehensively and at the national level. Using data from the national censuses of 1980 and 1991 at the departmental level, i.e. the third-order political and administrative scale in Argentina, his work has included the indicator *Holiday and*

weekend housing within the environmental dimension which, as the author highlights, is taken as a measure that indirectly refers to the degree of tourists attraction exerted by the departments.

While it is difficult to generalize situations, a high proportion of this type of housing implies the existence of positive elements with respect to the morphology of the landscape, mild climate and other resources that set up its tourist potential. (Velázquez 2001: 181)

Later this methodology has been replicated in Velázquez (2008), updated to the 2001 census.

At the same time, the use of this indicator has been common in other geographic studies for minor scales, but whose spatial analysis units were also the provinces, departments, or urban areas. While this has allowed for an approximate knowledge of the territorial distribution of the places where tourist entertainment converges, it is well worth noting that the use of indicators relating to the leisure activities that can be performed on a daily basis or several times a week in the living spaces of subjects were left out of the analysis. No doubt this situation was due to the lack of statistical information on these aspects.

However, once this problem is assimilated, further research indicates that, through subjective evaluation criteria related to the search for information provided by municipalities, the use of satellite images and direct field observation, in recent years the application of indicators that guide in favor of a territorial interpretation of leisure has increased, even though its location within the environmental domain persists and it does not appear as an independent dimension of analysis. In this regard, in Velázquez et al. (2014), the existence of *Recreational Resources of Natural Base (RRBN)* and *Recreational Resources Socially Constructed (RRSC)* are proposed as variables of the respective life quality index to the 2010 census. While the first category includes beaches, hot springs, snow used in recreational activities, water bodies and flows, and green spaces; the second distinguishes urban heritage, cultural, sporting and commercial or leisure centers.

In terms of the quality of life indices applied to the city of Mar del Plata, the book about Territory and Quality of Life directed by Lucero et al. (2008) incorporated the *Surface in square meters of green space per inhabitant* indicator in one of its chapters and, like at the national level, within the environmental dimension. For each census fraction⁵ that make up the city, Lucero et al. (2008) relate the total number of residents to the area of green spaces such as squares, beaches,⁶ seaside walks and forest reserves. As a result, and out of the data from the 2001 census, they obtain an average of 14.85 m² of public green space per inhabitant, a value significantly higher than the 9 m² recommended by the World Health Organization. Despite this fact, they emphasize that the territorial distribution towards the interior of the city is heterogeneous: coastal census fractions where spacious squares (4 acres) are located in the central area, and those census fractions within garden neighborhoods or forest reserves, coinciding with the more favorable situations. However, in this case, the analysis was limited to a narrated description of the indicator, regardless of its cartographic expression. As a product of their inclusion in the environmental dimension, the observations of the authors point to the importance of these spaces for urban sustainability rather than to their role as leisure spaces.

Nevertheless, in another chapter of the work above mentioned, Rivière (2008) studied the territorial distribution of household equipment related to the use of leisure time, using the same sources of data, specifically *Television (cable and satellite) and VCR property*. This work provides an interesting approach to what can be defined as Geography of stationary domestic leisure, where it is revealed that, despite the existence of a powerful coverage, the highest percentages of ownership of these objects match areas that register the

⁵Territorial unit of census analysis.

⁶While at first glance the consideration and treatment of the beach as a public green space becomes open to criticism, because it does not fit within a clear definition, its inclusion must be understood taking into account the place where the city of Mar del Plata is located (seaside city) and the recreational use that the population makes of it.

better standards of living. At the same time, in the case of the availability of VCRs, the repetition of the pattern of spatial distribution characteristic of the city of Mar del Plata is easily verified through cartography, where indicator values decrease gradually as concentric rings from the center to the periphery.

At the local level, the study of Celemín (2009) must also be highlighted, who, through the elaboration of two indices, one of a socio-economic nature and the other of an environmental quality, he applies the spatial autocorrelation technique to establish the degree of association between the two systems of evaluation. In this way, he obtained that

the more traditional sectors of the city of Mar del Plata, which recorded a good socio-economic status, have a greater ability to attain a healthy environment, i.e. away from factories, with abundant green spaces, adjacent to points of scenic attraction, among other variables. (Celemín 2009: 4)

Both public and private green spaces are mapped, and he warns about the difference in maintenance among those which form part of the traditional tourist circuits and those which do not. In turn, he includes the *Surface in square meters of Empty Urban Spaces per capita* variable, although from a negative perspective since, because of prioritizing the environmental vision, he refers more to the potential use of urban gaps as clandestine dumps than to its possibility to be used and adapted to the leisure needs of the population.

13.5 The City of Mar del Plata: A Brief Introduction

The origins of the “tourist” town of Mar del Plata (Fig. 6.1) paradoxically relates to the installation of the Beef Salting Industry, which determined the start of a slow but persistent change in the appearance of the region, since around it the first houses began to settle, thus giving birth to an urban nucleus. While the salting project did not obtain the expected success; “its consequence was a significant numerical increase of the inhabitants of the region” (Cacopardo 1997: 26). It was Patricio

Peralta Ramos who foresaw a profitable alternative with respect to the lands acquired from the failed salting venture, so he subdivided them into smaller parcels and planned the establishment of a town whose official foundation date was February 10th, 1874. Thus, it was the birth of a city on private lands, where the installation of the salting and the port facilities were joined by other fundamental features like the railway, the rise of agro-export economy⁷ and the incorporation of immigrants.

The beginning of 1880 was going to produce a change in the use of the territory, linked to

the emergence of the new social practices of leisure in relation to the sea, overlapped with the rural character of the primitive people, develops the seaside villa, and Mar del Plata becomes one of the more dynamical development cities of the Buenos Aires province. (Cacopardo 1997: 26)

In this way, as it is described by Lucero (2004), between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the thirties of the twentieth century, Mar del Plata was born and grew in population, occupying both the coastal and the original rural territories, a settlement favored by key economic activities according to the seaside resort town and its urban externalities.

Mantobani (1997) points out that

the emergence of the beach culture was the product of a process of transition, which generated profound changes in the organization of space and in society, from the primitive settlement dependent on agricultural activities to the high society town. (1997: 60)

The city was a “great national elite club” (Cacopardo 1997: 27), a promising virgin territory in the hands of a few owners closely linked to the power of the State; a mandatory tourist destination that served as a stage for consolidating the dominant groups of the time (Bertoncello 2006).

Towards the end of 1920, the *elite* began to share this space of holiday entertainment with other social groups to the extent that annual paid

⁷To expand on these aspects, Brailovsky and Foguelman (1991), Rofman and Romero (1997) and Gejo and Liberali (2006) are recommended, among other authors.

Fig. 6.1 The city of Mar del Plata in Argentina Republic (Source: elaboration of the authors)



holidays and tourism were recognized as the rights of all workers. In this way, Mar del Plata continued expanding its population base, more diversified now, increasing its surface and its height, due to the construction of high buildings. These socio-territorial transformations were causes and results of the phenomenon recognized as mass tourism, and the development of industrial activities. Thus, the early elitist Mar del Plata came to an end in the thirties of the twentieth century, now becoming “the national mass tourism of the beach and sun model” (Bertoncello 2006: 323), becoming more plural and heterogeneous. Separately, the town became

quickly a city suitable for the reproduction of surplus in services and, given their rapid growth, became an adequate urban framework to guide these surpluses towards the speculative investment in land and construction, a temporary labor force attraction sector, beginning to define the social division of the space. (Nuñez 1997: 95)

Once the role of Mar del Plata was nationally recognized and taken as a common territory of all Argentines at the local level, the popularity of the city persisted to the present day, although its future is strongly linked to the national political and economic issues, a consequence of its status as an internal tourist destination. For this reason, at pres-

ent the town is defined within the framework of the national urban system as an “*Aglomeración de Tamaño Intermedio Grande*”(ATIG) (Vapñarsky and Gorjosky 1990 in Velázquez 2008), occupied by 614,350 inhabitants (INDEC 2010, in Lucero et al. 2016), which is facing the vicissitudes associated, on the one hand, with the persistent tourism seasonality sustained in survival, by not always effective strategies, and in its unique identification to sea and beach resources, and on the other hand, with the regional context consisting of a whole set of towns demographically smaller, arising as more diverse or natural tourist options (Bertoncello 2006).

At the same time, and following the characterization of the tourism model of Mar del Plata by Barbini (2001), the city holds a strong territorial fragmentation. The type of accommodation used is the downtown apartment or houses located in proximity to the beach, either in property or rental, a fact that implies a high proportion of family and regular tourism to this destination, which in turn implies homogeneity of expectations (sunbathing during the day, going to the theatre or bingo at night, sightseeing the port area) and lower motivation to participation in new activities and attractions. As a result, there is a significant contrast between the eminently tourist coastline and its contiguous urban area, whose function is to serve as a space of residence for local people, the latter being a community that is surpassed when compared with tourists in terms of objects of study in the field of leisure and recreation.

13.6 Methodology

In order to provide a first empirical approach towards the difficulties about mismatches between leisure space and quality of life, we decided to overlap layers of georeferenced data in a geographic information system (GIS), a free software known as QGIS. Within this GIS, we included a background map showing the distribution of the different quality of life levels of the population living in Mar del Plata at the time of the 2010 census.

While reviewing various scientific works we learn that the construction of quality of life indices⁸ consists in the selection of a set of attributes (dimensions or domains) that are recognized as representative aspects of the level of well-being of the population. By applying multivariate analysis techniques, we constructed an index that summarizes the status of the indicators contained in, for example, education, sanitation, housing, work and environment dimensions, among other possibilities. Once the dimensions or domains to be used are established, and the variables selected, they are assigned or not weighting, this being a choice of the researcher or the working team.

Then, starting from the processing of the information, it is possible to design the original data matrix (MDO) which subsequently becomes an index data matrix (MDI), in order to establish the proportion of each indicator by selected spatial unit (radios, fractions, cities, provinces, countries). Finally such a matrix allows obtaining the ultimate index numbers by applying the corresponding formulas.⁹

In connection with the above mentioned, it must be highlighted that since 2004 the Group of Studies On Population and Territory (GESPyT), based at the National University of Mar del Plata, is developing a line of research devoted to the study of quality of life, starting from the development of indices for its measurement in the southeast of the province of Buenos Aires and in Mar del Plata, General Pueyrredon district (Lucero et al. 2005, 2008, 2016; Mikkelsen and Velázquez 2013).

The most recent application without weighting of the index for the city of Mar del Plata, using information from the latest national census carried out in 2010, was published in 2016. Dimensions recovered were: Education, Sanitation, Housing and Economic Activity. The Education dimension variable was called *highest achieved educational level*, and included the fol-

⁸Palomino and López (2000); Velázquez (2001); Hagerty et al. (2001), Estes (2005), Mayoralas Fernández and Rojo Pérez (2005); Lucero et al. (2005, 2008 y 2016); Sirgy et al. (2006); Marans and Stimson (2011).

⁹Omega Score or Standard Deviation.

lowing indicators: percentage of population of 20–59 years that finished the secondary or *polimodal*¹⁰ level, and percentage of population of 26–59 years that finished the university level.

The Sanitation dimension retrieved two variables: *water connection within the dwelling*, analyzed by the percentage of population in households with water connection within the dwelling, and *connection to a sewer or septic tank and cesspit*, studied from the percentage of population in households with sewer connection or connection to septic tank and cesspit.

As for the Housing dimension, it contained the following variables: *overcrowding*, studied by the percentage of population in households without overcrowding (two or fewer persons); and *quality materials* (INMAT), through the percentage of the population in households with INMAT-1, namely resistant and solid materials on the floor and roof; with ceiling.

The Economic Activity dimension was finally recovered from the variable *condition of activity*, systematized through the employment rate, i.e. the ratio between the employed population and the population 14 years and over; and percentage of inactive heads of households over the age of 64.

Overlapped with the cartographic representation of the levels of quality of life of the population, there are two other layers of georeferenced information that denote the location of places that, as was previously mentioned, maintain a high predisposition to the expenditure of leisure time in the city. With a view to include both Natural Base and Socially Constructed Recreational Resources (Velázquez and Celemin 2013) public green spaces, squares and parks, and shopping streets, were selected. In both cases, data came from secondary sources related to the listings provided by the Municipality of General Pueyrredon District.

In association with the public green spaces layer, the creation of *buffers* or influence zones was added, a technique provided by the GIS software that is useful to analyze the accessibility of

green spaces from the establishment of an area of coverage of 500 linear meters around each polygon without, in this case, discriminating according to the size of the squares or parks. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the limit to be used represents a decision of the investigator and that, on this occasion, such a measure is based on the choice to explore an intermediate value between the different distances that are usually taken, which vary between 300 m (English Nature) and 900 m (European Environment Agency) (Reyes Packe and Figueroa Aldunce 2010).

From the superposition of systematized information layers and the explanations given, the mapping result is shown below, accompanied by an interpretation which derives from the visual reading of the map and the recapitulation of some of the theoretical aspects that are discussed in the following pages.

13.7 Leisure Space and Quality of Life in Mar del Plata

Figure 6.2 is the result of the superposition of layers of information and the techniques detailed in the previous section. It exhibits some complexity and serves to reaffirm García Ballesteros quote (2001) about today's difficulty to interpret leisure from the territorial point of view. However, broadly speaking, the spatial configuration obtained reveals that the political and social advancements of the past years have failed to reverse or slow the pattern of the uneven territorial distribution characteristic of this city. In this sense, we can see the existence of two urban realities, on the one hand that of the East, corresponding to the coastal tourism sector with high and medium levels of quality of life, and on the other hand, across the West, that is, inside the city, an area that reveals lower levels of quality of life (Lucero et al. 2005).

Bearing in mind the resulting territorial arrangement index of quality of life, the inclusion of some of the main areas of urban leisure to the debate on local geography contributes to feed one of the objectives of this work. In this way, we find

¹⁰High School level of education put into practice in Argentina between 1993 and 2009.

Fig. 6.2 Public green spaces, commercial streets and quality of life in the city of Mar del Plata (Source: elaboration of the authors on the basis of Lucero et al. (2016), Population, Households and Housing Census 2010 (INDEC) and data of the municipality of General Pueyrredon district)



that, largely, the territorial distribution of the squares, parks and shopping streets responds to the above mentioned model (East–West), although it is more easily observed in the last two cases, given that squares expand towards the interior of the city, because of its status as a basic element of the neighborhoods identity and a generally considered matter in urban policies, although there is evidence that not all the neighborhoods of Mar del Plata have a public square.

In terms of commercial spaces, the map shows Mar del Plata as a polycentric city, an urban space composed by a group of eleven shopping streets that emerged spontaneously in response to the

needs of the resident population and, in some cases, of tourists; but above all in response to the general consumer society model. In this case, we perceive that its location produces a considerable fragmentation in the local territory because of its coincidence with high and media life quality areas.

On the other hand, the particular study of public green spaces in the city claim mentioning first of all the central position that, even nowadays, occupy the so called Seven Foundational Squares (Lamas 2014), dating from the original urban layout corresponding to the year 1874, and that integrate both a significant part of the *Central*

Business District (CBD) and the territory used by and for tourism. In comparison to the majority of the neighborhood squares which were established in later stages of urban expansion, this set of green areas also excels by its larger size (four city blocks), with the exception of the irregular shapes of the two squares that limit with the coast.

Due to their central location and closeness, the 500 m apart criterion, which is applied in this occasion, points to satisfactory accessibility to public green spaces in this part of town; a sensible attribute if we take into account that it also records the highest population density. At the same time, and as it was already implied, we detect that the location of these squares coincides with areas that reveal high and media assigned life quality indexes, i.e. areas having percentage values of university level population greater than 5%, population, in households with connection to water within housing above 98%, population in households without overcrowding exceeding 83%, and employment rate above 61%, among other indicators that make up the index.

However, an essential question to keep in mind is that, at the local level, the most aged demographic structures reside in this sector of ancient and traditional squares (Lucero et al. 2016) and that, according to the average annual growth rates for recent censuses, reductions in the number of inhabitants are recorded (Sagua and Sabuda 2015). In this sense, for the purpose of providing an interpretation traversed by the concepts of everyday and constructive leisure space, we might think that the resulting territorial configuration in this sector is a prime example of territorial imbalance, insofar as it is a zone that provides ample opportunities for the placing of sociability, artistic manifestations and outdoor sports, juxtaposed on a population group whose rate of growth diminishes and that, moreover, contains better living conditions compared to other territorial cuts from the city where this type of public spaces could be more necessary.

Possibly the last mentioned feature emphasizes inequality at the local level if we think that the possibilities of access to weekly/monthly attendance leisure spaces (for example large

urban parks, lagoons in the surrounding rural space, little seaside towns belonging to the region), and more still to tourism, are strongly narrowed in ways that make up the living conditions of the population, such as the possession of material goods and the socio-cultural capital obtained, after having ensured the basic necessities included in the index. Examples of this can be to own a vehicle or to have access to a network of public transport.

As we move away from the center of the city, we can appreciate territorial fragments that stay out of the 500 m range from public green spaces. At this point there is a correlation with the lower population densities and, in the specific cases of the West and Southwest urban edges, quality of life acquires the most critical values presented by this study area. As a kind of representation, in such peripheral areas the quality of life index indicators returned values of population with university-level less than 0.5%, population in households with connection to water within housing around 60%, population in households without overcrowding not more than 45%, and although it may seem strange at first glance, exceeding 68% employment rate, i.e. some points above the areas where quality of life was registered as high and medium. But why might such a situation be? According to Lucero et al. (2016), two causes relate to this circumstance:

first, the most aged population structure being in the areas with best general conditions of life (...) since the employment rate is described taking into account the total population of 14 years of age and older; and second, integrated measures not taking into account the quality of employment, so it could occur that a large proportion of the jobs that the inhabitants of areas with low and very low levels carry out (...) are located in the informal segment of the labor market, shielded by insufficiency in income levels, in stability and social protection. (Lucero et al. 2016: 7)

Unlike the central urban area, places that surround the official urban limit display increasing annual average growth rates, although at unequal rhythms according to sectors (Sagua and Sabuda 2015). As a result of this situation, another type of territorial imbalance is revealed, insofar as we observe contradictions between the demographic

growth associated with low levels of quality of life and the lesser possibilities of access to green public spaces, a situation that can get worst if the separation with regard to the main commercial streets is taken into account. However, the great amount of public green spaces located along the South extension of the city and the satisfactory coverage that is expressed through the *buffers* draw our attention, being one of the more recent populated areas.

13.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused our attention on the relationship between leisure space and quality of life from a territorial point of view. Even if, so far, in assessments of quality of life in Argentina, leisure has not been taken into account as a domain or dimension of independent analysis, it is within the environmental domain where we could find several socio-spatial indicators that allow for an approximate reading on territorial leisure space distribution at different scales. Holiday and weekend houses, the existence of Recreational Resources of Natural Base (RRNB) and Recreational Resources Socially Constructed (RRSC), surface in square meters of green spaces per inhabitant, television and VCR property (cable and satellite), and surface in square meters of empty urban space per capita, were indicators identified in this research that could be included in future quality of life indices. Therefore, we consider that there is a possibility of meeting these indicators in a future time, and probably others, to equate leisure space to level of education, health, housing, economic activity an even environment. In this way, we will contemplate that its inclusion among the indices of quality of life would represent a qualitative leap and, at the same time, an Act of Justice in relation to the aspects valued by contemporary society. However, the greater difficulty for a diachronic treatment of this dimension will be the access to the information since, for example in the case of the Argentine censuses, their variables tend to be modified with the passing of the time and, in those cases where a personal survey of the infor-

mation is carried out, that implies working in another type of scales.

In regards to the empirical study carried out, we were able to build a first map reflecting the existence of territorial imbalances between types of leisure spaces and levels of quality of life. Through it, we have observed that, in general terms, the best situations in education, health and housing correspond to an overlapping with the areas of influence of public green spaces and the greater proximity to the shopping streets. Otherwise, the most critical values of quality of life coincide with neighborhoods that, despite displaying lower demographic densities, contain huge areas outside the boundary established in this opportunity to analyze the access to public green spaces and, at the same time, don't have shopping streets. As an outcome of this evidence, we attained a first signal about the possible dissatisfactions that exist in relation to the accessibility to the spaces of leisure of the city of Mar del Plata. In this way, and to some extent, the achieved map is in itself a tool to testify the permanence of a duality based on urban materiality that characterizes this territory, where tourism undoubtedly becomes a force that encourages disparities since it demands the installation of localized areas for leisure activities in such a way that they complement the main tourist attraction of the city, namely the beach.

Finally, the work done has been useful to establish new questions linked to this line of research, which may help build a map of a more complex and close to reality leisure. While we assimilated a general and georeferenced look on the distribution of public green spaces in the city, a collection of qualitative knowledge that enable us to dig into issues like their differences in equipment and everyday uses is still missing, without forgetting aspects of social relevance such as, for example, the organized harmful leisure options spread out in the city, i.e. the areas of substance abuse, compulsive gambling or irrational consumption, among other possibilities. At the same time, and as stated, to include in the debate places where culture takes place and is enacted (neighborhood clubs, dance and music schools, theatres, shopping malls), in an attempt

to expand our knowledge about the choices that contribute to our personal development and quality of life from a geographic perspective.

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