

The periphery of independent bookshops in the face of the centralisation of the Mexican publishing industry.

La periferia de las librerías independientes ante la centralización de la industria editorial mexicana.

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Received: 07/10/2025 Reviewed: 22/11/2025 Approved: 03/12/2025

DOI: 10.32870/rhgc.e0027

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Abstract:

Based on a general overview of the centralisation of the publishing industry in Mexico in the private and bookshop sector, this article presents an analysis of the current situation in which independent bookshops operate as a form of resistance to market priorities and demands. Based on interviews with booksellers from El Traspatio (Morelia) and La Cosecha (San Cristóbal de las Casas), the article seeks to contribute to the construction of a written archive that demonstrates the main challenges they face as a project on the periphery of the country, as well as the social spaces they have strengthened in their bookshops through years of constant work. It concludes that the current strategies of independent book agents are a crucial part of the resistance to the system, such as the creation of alliances between booksellers and publishers, the organisation of meetings and festivals on literary themes that integrate current and urgent discussions, as well as a common commitment to bibliodiversity that mitigates the homogenisation of publishing catalogues.

Keywords: Cultural centralisation. Cultural homogenisation. Independent bookshops. Independent publishing. Bibliodiversity. Periphery.

Resumen:

A partir de una aproximación general a la centralización de la industria editorial en México en el sector privado y librero, este artículo presenta un análisis del estado actual en el que operan las librerías independientes como resistencia a las prioridades y exigencias del mercado. Gracias al resultado de las entrevistas a las librerías de El Traspatio (Morelia) y La Cosecha (San Cristóbal de las Casas), se busca contribuir a la construcción de un acervo escrito que demuestre los principales retos que enfrentan como proyecto en la periferia del país, así como los espacios sociales que fortalecieron en sus librerías a través de años de trabajo constante. Se concluye que las estrategias actuales de los agentes independientes del libro son una parte crucial de la resistencia al sistema, como la creación de alianzas entre libreros y editores, el funcionamiento de encuentros y festivales bajo alguna temática literaria que integre discusiones actuales y urgentes, así como la apuesta en común por la bibliodiversidad que mitiga la homogeneización de catálogos editoriales.

Palabras clave: Centralización cultural. Homogeneización cultural. Librerías independientes. Edición independiente. Bibliodiversidad. Periferia.

Introduction

Currently, through technology, public space is becoming a virtual and physical meeting point where the community, through artistic interventions and cultural projects, can redefine the urban landscape to provide a platform for artistic and cultural expression that promotes community participation and the democratisation of art. The aim of this paper is to analyse how this transformation of public space into community, through access to artistic and cultural experiences via digital platforms and connectivity, can generate a local economy that benefits both creators and artists and the community itself. It also reviews the possible social repercussions and benefits of this, based on the following considerations:

1. The impact of digital platforms and social networks on the redefinition of urban public space.
2. The democratisation of and access to art and culture through digital platforms for the economic benefit of creators.
3. The new ways in which art and culture emerge in the urban public spaces of a community and their economic benefits.
4. Strategies for using digital technologies and platforms to create a local arts and culture market.

These approaches make it possible to lay the foundations for a new conception of public space from an artistic and cultural perspective, where technology acts as a means for the economic development of creators, artists and the community.

Digital platforms and public space

Traditionally, urban public space has been conceived as a physical place for meeting, interaction and the expression of ideas: squares, parks, gardens and streets, among others. However, with the expansion of digital platforms, this notion is changing, giving way to a fusion between physical and virtual spaces. Digital technology and social networks have enabled citizens to organise and mobilise beyond physical boundaries: from organising marches for collectives to coordinating large-scale protests. This breaking down of physical barriers has led to a psychosocial transformation, particularly visible among young people and young adults (hereinafter referred to as "Generation X"), who shape their identity and daily lives based on these technologies and means of communication. As a result, the use of spaces is being redefined from work and commercial to recreational and cultural.

An example of this can be seen in his article *Young People Facing the World: Digital technologies as a support for everyday life*, by Lemus (2017), who, based on interviews with young Argentinians, analyses how new technologies, social networks and digital platforms have transformed the social interactions of these young people today, as these tools serve not only to communicate, form emotional bonds and express interests, but also to construct new practices, activities, behaviours

and identities. Lemus highlights how these technologies manifest themselves in different aspects of life: school, family and social life. He concludes that digital technologies are now a "support" for the way young people live, which, due to the speed of information and the world, must be addressed in a situated manner, since, in effect, young people currently use these tools to form and establish their own individuality and sense of belonging.

To address this dynamic proposed by Lemus, it is important to modernise, manage and conceptualise a new public space that corresponds to the changing, evolving and fleeting nature of current trends, as well as the dynamics generated both in the internet metaverse and in human coexistence within communities.

Added to this is the impact that social media has also had in transforming urban public space in more subtle but equally significant ways. These interactions occur on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and affect the way individuals (users) perceive and experience cities. Images of iconic places, murals, urban landmarks, and public events shared online, by generating visits, communicating, or informing, contribute to the creation of a "digital city" parallel to and coexisting with physical space. This phenomenon has also driven the digital gentrification of some places, where the popularity of certain businesses, neighbourhoods, landmarks or urban spaces on these social networks turns them into virtual tourist destinations, attracting new audiences that can change the local dynamic.

In addition, tools such as geolocation and map applications have facilitated new forms of mobility and appropriation of urban space. An example of this phenomenon is the case of PokemonGO, an augmented reality (AR) mobile video game which, through its popularity, has brought together groups of people (of different ages and social groups) for recreational activities guided geographically and socially by the gameplay of the application. This not only facilitated access to leisure activities, but also promoted greater connection between people and the city, blurring the boundaries between the private and the public, the physical and the digital.

This phenomenon can be transferred to the local context, such as the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. This city has numerous public spaces that are underutilised due to various social factors (insecurity, maintenance, design, etc.). However, according to González (2024), former Secretary of Culture for the State of Jalisco (2012–2024):

Having good pillars that provide accurate and reliable information will allow states, such as Jalisco, to make better decisions regarding their cultural policies and to understand their dynamics and implications based on evidence. It is also a way to vindicate and position the role that culture plays in social inclusion, participation, and the well-being of communities (p.8).

This is important because this vision of the role of culture in a society such as Guadalajara's, beset by the breakdown of the social fabric and the underuse of public space, highlights areas of opportunity that can be addressed through the practical and everyday use of technologies, social networks and digital platforms, both by the government and by communities. Not only in

the artistic-cultural sphere, but also in the generation of economic and social development opportunities that can be replicated in different community settings.

A notable example of cultural impact in public spaces through digital platforms in Guadalajara is the "Fray Antonio Alcalde" Literary Walk. The newspaper *La Crónica de Hoy* (2022) reports in its article "The 2.8 kilometres of Paseo Alcalde will become the largest Literary Walk in the world" how this literary intervention, promoted by the University of Guadalajara, transformed Paseo Alcalde into an interactive cultural corridor in which plaques with quotes from Jalisco writers were installed, each with a QR code that allows passers-by to access biographies and literary works. In addition, the city council enabled 42 free Wi-Fi access points, offering more than 13,500 e-books, making Paseo Alcalde the largest literary promenade of its kind in the world.

In conclusion, we must reflect on how digital platforms and social networks are reconfiguring urban public space by expanding the possibilities for interaction and participation beyond physical barriers. The coexistence of physical and virtual urban space raises new possibilities for redefining public space in this digital age and for ensuring inclusive access so that community members can create, participate and develop new economic and social dynamics based on art and culture that restore the social fabric.

Democratisation and access to art today

Since the end of the 20th century, with population growth and increasing social inequality, access to artistic and cultural works has been limited to certain social groups, large capital, political power and/or those who could afford to attend museums, galleries, theatres, festivals, among others. However, with the proliferation of the internet and digital platforms, geographical, economic and social barriers have been significantly reduced.

Today, anyone with an internet connection can explore a vast amount of artistic content, from art exhibitions to theatre performances and concerts, regardless of their location or purchasing power. The emphasis is on geographical barriers because, given this accessibility, it is inconceivable that these digital dynamics, as mentioned in the previous section, have not been fully transported to the local level, to the city, to communities and, finally, to the public space, where they allow inhabitants and, above all, creators to participate.

Understanding that geographical barriers can be dissolved thanks to current tools, they must also be conceived as a resource on which creatives and the community, just like any other canvas, dance hall or quarry, can mould activities and social, artistic and cultural interactions. These dynamics can give rise to both temporary and permanent manifestations that strengthen the urban and psychological sense of belonging of those who create, live and experience them, as well as the economic benefits that may arise from them.

Regarding the democratisation of culture, García (2021), in *La democratización de la cultura y la socialización del conocimiento en un contexto de crisis* (The democratisation of culture and the socialisation of knowledge in a context of crisis), takes an interesting historical journey to show how technological resources transform the way civilisation conceives and manifests culture, influencing social, political and economic structures, including the cultural spectrum itself. He argues that technology should be used not only as a tool for communication and information, but also transferred to the creative, educational and critical spheres, promoting more participatory and democratic institutions and collectives in terms of access to culture and the development of society.

This is relevant and very significant because, as mentioned above, like public space, technology is a resource and, together, they become a contemporary tool: the new "brush and canvas" for free access to artistic and cultural development, both today and in the future, making it more democratic and humanistic.

The democratisation of art has sought to generate more inclusive access to culture and new artistic expressions, driven by both public and private initiatives that promote the participation of diverse communities in artistic projects. In his article *The Democratisation of Art through Social Media*, Lau (2024) states:

[...] growing awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion in art is leading to greater support and visibility for marginalised and underrepresented artists in the art industry. Social media is playing a crucial role in this process by allowing these artists to share their work with a global audience and challenge established norms in art.

Based on Lau's arguments and in agreement with García, an essential component for democratising art and culture is emerging: it is not enough to democratise access to art, we must also recognise and vindicate those who produce it, the artists and creators. There must be a current and modern awareness that, beyond galleries and social media, values the art that is generated in the community environment, where word of mouth and local interaction are fundamental. Furthermore, just as it is possible to disseminate works on a global scale through digital platforms, offering them locally can create a market that strengthens both the cultural development of the community and the economic livelihood of artists and creators.

However, it is important to add that, as a new problem, gentrification in certain contexts can interfere with these processes. Creating local cultural markets can raise the cost of living for artistic and cultural products, as well as transform the social dynamics of the communities where they are implemented. This could limit the access of the working classes to art and culture. Therefore, adequate management and organisation is necessary, either by the government or the community itself, to take advantage of these opportunities in a sustainable and equitable manner, using geographical, urban and technological resources.

Popular dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, Grinder, and the traditional Meta apps function as user banks where interests, skills, and goals can be viewed on demand. These features can be used in the community to create social connections

that help creators express their interests and works, while communicating, educating, and cultivating new forms of digital and physical coexistence.

The same is true of platforms focused on the dissemination of certain disciplines or products, such as Spotify, Apple Music, Netflix, among others, including institutional and dedicated ones. Although they disseminate content, they often lack true social interaction, which opens up an opportunity to transfer these products to the local sphere and bring them closer to real users in physical environments.

In short, the democratisation of art, supported by technology, not only broadens access, but can also generate a more inclusive, pluralistic and economically sustainable culture, where the active and critical participation of the community is the driving force behind a profound transformation of urban public space.

Art, culture, urban spaces and digital connectivity

One of the most visible ways in which art emerges in urban spaces is thanks to digital connectivity through interactive urban art and digital installations. The streets, squares and buildings of cities become canvases for a variety of projects that use technology to transform public space.

Fonseca (2014) already argued that public space must adapt to the characteristics of contemporary life and new forms of communication such as mobile applications, video games, social networks and other media, which allow inhabitants to take ownership of these spaces.

Video projections, light installations, interactive murals and digital art on public screens allow art to become an integral part of the urban landscape, while inviting passers-by to interact and participate in the experience. Social media plays a key role in the dissemination and visibility of these urban interventions, as people can instantly share their experiences, creating a connection between physical space, the digital sphere, and community life.

This is where popular culture is the first to manifest itself, monopolising the socio-cultural and economic discourse of the population at a global level, but acquiring deeper meanings at a local level, depending on the context. In Mexico, for example, popular artistic criticism and expression (from the Revolution to the present day) expresses social, political and identity struggles. Monsiváis (1981) points out:

In Mexican popular culture, beneath the entertainment and amusement, there are struggles for employment and housing, and fierce resistance to multiple forms of oppression. Essentially, popular culture is not the mechanical sum of what an industry has to offer, but rather the way in which a community takes on and assimilates these offerings, transforming them into a quest for rights: the right to work, to humour, to sexuality, to civic life. If such a definition is rhetorical, at least it does not make the whole dependent on a classical formation at the dawn of time. Popular culture today is a matter of daily militant definition in all fields. (p.33)

As Monsiváis inspires, digital connectivity should be seen as an opportunity to foster new forms of collective cultural participation. Digital platforms can function as spaces for collaborative creation, promoting citizen initiatives such as collective murals, live-streamed performances, or community music and dance projects, among many others.

These projects form new interactions that can be incorporated into a new cultural market, with the teaching of the use of these new technologies and expressions, attracting a more contemporary audience: people whose lives have been mediated by digital technologies, streaming, programming, video games, projections, etc. These disciplines can take on a social and cultural character, blurring the barriers between the digital and the physical, opening up opportunities for educational and artistic ventures.

As a result, digital connectivity has triggered a real revolution in the way art and culture emerge in the urban spaces of communities. By offering new forms of creation, participation and dissemination, digital technologies have made art more accessible, inclusive and dynamic, enriching the urban cultural experience and making cities more lively, connected and participatory places that unravel the beauty of the most human product, art.

Implications of culture and technology use

The integration of digital technologies into public spaces not only transforms cultural and urban dynamics, but also poses new challenges in terms of accessibility and equity. According to Campiti and Sanjurjo (2021), echoing Winner (1985), they explain that:

s developed by societies, consciously or unconsciously, influence the way people work, communicate, travel or consume. As they facilitate power, authority and help establish privileges, s cannot be considered neutral. [...] Political qualities are not exempt in these cases, as authorities can be established and existing asymmetrical relationships strengthened.

These observations about technologies in general are applicable to digital technologies in particular. However, as Campiti and Sanjurjo suggest, these transformations have brought with them new challenges related to accessibility, equity and control of public space. The design and management of these new spaces require a balance between technological innovation and respect for the social and cultural diversity of communities.

The creation of public cultural spaces in the digital sphere often involves private actors and technology companies that, through algorithms and commercial platforms, can influence the type of content that is displayed and how it is distributed. This relates to the concerns about the commercialisation of art and culture mentioned above, and to the possible exclusion of cultural groups or expressions that do not fit the commercial interests of these platforms. Furthermore, unequal

access to technology and connectivity in different areas of a community, city or context can create a divide between those who have the ability to actively participate in these spaces and those who are left on the sidelines, exacerbating social and urban inequalities within the community.

Therefore, the management and modernisation of public policies must be streamlined to address these realities. However, even if these transformations are slow, creators can use existing technological and digital resources to take ownership of the discourse and daily life of their communities: their stories, languages, talents, problems and dynamics that are expressed in streets, squares and parks, shaping the culture that manifests itself in art and defines human beings through their environment.

This feeling of cultural empowerment over the city is reflected in Chávez's analysis (2014), who, echoing García Canclini, concludes:

Cities are not only physical environments dominated by the materiality of their streets, parks, buildings and signs. Cities are also configured as images (García Canclini, 1997), [...] Ultimately, the city becomes dense, charged with heterogeneous fantasies, individual and collective fictions.

According to this view, as Canclini suggests, it is important to involve technology in social dynamics, not only in the artistic-cultural sphere. Currently, modernity should be brought to the city through the potential of a virtually interconnected world, in the post-always era, of today's human beings, hungry for visibility, recognition and fleeting experiences that they can achieve without travelling long distances or spending money, simply by going out onto the street, remembering and rediscovering that, like them, this virtual world also exists in everyday reality.

Strategies for investing in culture through technology

Currently, as has been argued, artistic and cultural activities can play a fundamental role in the economic and social development of communities. The implementation of digital technologies, such as mobile applications, digital art, video games, among others, opens up new opportunities to boost the local economy through the management and promotion of cultural events in public spaces.

An example of this is investment in digital art laboratories in community contexts. These spaces not only encourage local artistic production through technological tools, but also stimulate processes of social innovation and strengthen the social fabric. As Beltrán and Alsina (2020) point out, citizen and digital art laboratories can act as cultural mediation devices capable of articulating technical and everyday knowledge, promoting co-creation between artists, technologists and the community. This articulation generates symbolic and material value in territories often marginalised by traditional cultural industries, paving the way for new models of sustainability and cultural entrepreneurship.

From an economic perspective, investing in this type of decentralised cultural infrastructure makes it possible to boost emerging cultural markets and democratise access to digital artistic production. Researcher Andrés Walliser (2013) highlights that the creation of cultural ecosystems in peripheral neighbourhoods has positive effects on urban revitalisation, generating employment and new networks of collaboration. Likewise, UNESCO (2021) emphasises the role of digital culture as an engine of sustainable development, pointing out that community creation spaces can contribute to digital inclusion and, as mentioned above, educational innovation.

Another effective strategy is the implementation of mobile applications for community cultural management, which can be effective in boosting the local economy through artistic and cultural activities in public spaces. By facilitating the organisation, dissemination and participation in cultural events, these applications promote the appropriation of public space, strengthen community identity and foster the local cultural economy.

Studies such as those by Deuze (2007) highlight the need to bridge the digital divide through policies that recognise the strategic value of local creativity as a driver of social cohesion and development. Therefore, investing in these technologies not only involves providing equipment, but also building sustainable cultural ecosystems focused on community development.

In short, investing in culture through digital technologies represents a key strategy for promoting economic, social and cultural development in community contexts. Initiatives such as digital art laboratories and mobile cultural management applications not only democratise access to artistic creation, but also strengthen social cohesion, foster innovation and boost the local economy. By articulating technical and community knowledge, these strategies make it possible to build sustainable cultural ecosystems that value local creativity as a strategic resource for social and urban transformation. That is why technology applied to culture should not be seen solely as a tool, but as an engine for the comprehensive development of territories.

Conclusion

The use of digital platforms in shaping the new public space has redefined social, cultural and urban dynamics. This phenomenon, driven by digital connectivity, opens up opportunities for greater inclusion and citizen participation in cultural processes, allowing communities not only to access art and culture, but also to become active agents of creation, dissemination and transformation.

Throughout this work, we have shown how the integration of physical space and the digital environment generates new forms of appropriation of urban space, facilitating more accessible, dynamic and inclusive artistic expressions. However, this process is not without its challenges: inequalities in access to technology, the concentration of power in commercial

platforms and the possible exclusion of certain social sectors. This requires critical, participatory management of both the digital and physical cultural ecosystems.

The key lies in finding a balance between innovation and social justice, between connectivity and diversity, between technology and humanity. It is essential to rethink public policies, strengthen citizen participation and promote a collective vision of public space as a place of encounter, creation, memory and transformation.

In this context, the individual ceases to be a passive spectator and becomes a creator, disseminator and manager of a more democratic, pluralistic and committed culture. This new digital and cultural citizenship contributes to artistic and urban development and promotes the construction of communities that are more aware and cohesive with the modern world and new urban models.

Finally, public space is configured as a living platform, where the urban and the digital are in constant dialogue, revealing the power of art as a vehicle for identity, justice and belonging for a new society that is more cultured, educated, reflective, active and committed to the city, safety, the environment, etc., and, as if that were not enough, to human beings.

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