



LSLP Micro-Paper 108:

Cityscapes

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Defining the Term

In today's world, we often rely on simplicity because life moves so fast. That is why some people still see the city as a concrete and steel setting made only for human interaction. Nevertheless, from a [critical literacies](#) perspective, the city is a vivid, breathing text that can be analyzed in many ways. Cityscapes represent the semiotic layering of urban spaces (where signs, murals, and architecture converge to tell stories official discourses often leave out).

These landscapes are dynamic sources of meaning, where every color and line acts as a [linguistic](#) and cultural marker. This understanding pushes many people out of their comfort zone, challenging the classic division between the physical and the symbolic and suggesting that streets are curated files of human experience that require critical reading.

A Cityscape becomes a pedagogical encounter in which the observer actively reads social realities. By understanding the city as a "semiotic setting", we recognize that urban elements, from professional graffiti to spontaneous protests of art, function as a complex grammatical structure. This structure does not describe the environment on its own but builds the identity of its inhabitants. Therefore, Cityscapes serve as a primary source for understanding how power relations and resistance are negotiated in today's city, transforming the urban layout into an open-access library of collective narratives.

Connecting it to LSLP

At LSLP, we argue that [literacies](#) go beyond traditional classrooms. Our research focuses on how language learners inhabit and reclaim their surroundings as legitimate spaces for identity construction. Including cityscapes in our framework lets us explore how urban art, specifically in Medellín's Comuna 13, functions as analepsis, a narrative flashback that brings the past into the present to reshape collective memory and foster social healing.

When analyzing these urban canvases, we align with the LSLP mission of "reclaiming the city as a learning space", which makes every street an opportunity for critical

inquiry. By applying [urban ethnography](#), learners navigate these third spaces as lived, contested sites, expanding our broader understanding of [city literacies](#).

We seek to understand the way these narratives disrupt the status quo, allowing underestimated communities to rewrite their history. In LSLP, we view the Cityscape as an essential perspective for place-making, where learners do not observe a culture but participate in the semiotic reconstruction of their territory by mixing their lived experiences with academic discourses.

Expanding Second Language Research

Being aware of Cityscapes opens new doors for second language research by shifting toward a place-based approach in which the city becomes a textbook. For language students, engaging in urban landscapes is an exercise in profound memory work. It requires them to decode cultural metaphors and historical references, fostering a [critical media literacy](#) rooted in their local reality. This engagement transforms the learner from a passive recipient of linguistic rules into a critical analyst.

By teaching students to read the Cityscapes that surround them, we are not just teaching a new language; we are empowering them to recognize their agency within the narrative fabric of society. Cityscapes connect with [geosemiotics](#) and [soundscapeing](#) by analyzing how visual signs and acoustic layers construct meaning within specific physical placements.

This pedagogical mindset turns walking through the city into an act of critical literacy, challenging learners to see themselves as authors of the place they live in and to interpret the echoes of the past in everyday life.

References

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author wrote the different drafts of this text without AI assistance. Before uploading the micro-paper, final edits were made using Grammarly. The author takes full responsibility for the publication's content.



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