

## The perceptive experience of the heritage landscape

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**Topic:** T2.2 Heritage education and social inclusion

### Abstract

*Education on heritage environments based on user experience is committed to understanding and enhancing the heritage landscape. The proposal prioritizes "experimenting" over "explaining" to reduce the digital divide and to guarantee equal access to information and knowledge. The urban environment of the church of the Santos Juanes is one of the most characteristic places in the history of the city of Valencia. In the same environment there are emblematic monuments such as the Lonja de la Seda and the Mercat Central of Valencia. Despite all of the above, the landscape has suffered considerable deterioration in recent decades. The lack of a safe urban space, the weak treatment of urban connections to monuments and the physical deterioration of the building have been the factors that have caused the creation of an environment conducive to alienating behaviors with the place. The high degree of alienation has led to the production of campaigns to prevent and prosecute these behaviors by the municipal administration, however there are no proposals to help understand and know these places. Currently, the redevelopment works of this environment are being undertaken, so it is of interest to propose an educational proposal about the heritage area to stimulate interest, learning, experience and exploration. Visits and workshops on the interpretation and sensitive experience of the cultural landscape bring citizens closer to experiencing the church of the Santos Juanes in a way not based on a data compilation discourse. In conclusion, experiencing, knowing and sharing these environments strengthens the relationship between citizens and their cultural heritage. At the same time, these exercises help to collect information on how citizens perceive and value their heritage environments.*

**Keywords:** Experience, Church of the Santos Juanes, Heritage meaning, Heritage education

### 1. Introduction

To begin with, the concept of "experience" arises within phenomenology and is conceived as a generator of knowledge and knowledge about the environment. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) defines experimentation as the process of perception, therefore the notion of perceptual experience is formulated (Bech, 2005). In the architectural field, Steen Eiler Rasmussen (1898-1990) recognizes primary perceptual patterns in architecture capable of generating significant experiences (Rasmussen, 2000). Recognizing the perceptive experience as a perception process,

Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) adds the role of cognition and underlines its importance in said process (Norberg-Schulz, 1979). Cognition about the environment is formalized in "perceptual schemes" that provide the knowledge to order and catalog the most primary capture of external stimuli. In conclusion, the perception of external stimuli, selected, ordered and cataloged by perceptual schemes (cognition) allow us to understand and judge the built environment (Aragonés, 1998). For this reason, as defined by environmental psychology, the perception pro-

cess is a producer and indicator of the environmental meaning that people attribute to architecture. From the preliminary analysis, it is determined that the environmental meaning of each individual about the environment is constructed by the process of perceptual experimentation (Corraliza, 1987). In this way, research on the perceptual process aims to collect the environmental meanings of various social profiles (users) on a given built environment. These individual meanings are grouped according to their characteristics in social meanings. In heritage architecture, the monument and its surroundings become a laboratory where meanings of all levels appear. For this reason, studying and synthesizing the significant complexity of this type of environment, added to a holistic analysis of the monument, could represent an advance in the enhancement of this type of architecture. The synthesis of the meanings that appear in a historical environment could be called "patrimonial meaning". To summarize, the motivation for researching the perceptual experience in historical environments is to discover the "patrimonial meaning" that citizens attribute to these spaces. The results obtained will open two main lines of action: on the one hand, incorporating the conclusions into the criteria of architectural intervention, and in this way, contributing from the design process to enhancement; and on the other hand, carry out educational activities during the restoration process of the historical environment that enhance and recover the "heritage meaning".

## 2. The Church of the *Santos Juanes* and its urban environment

The architectural landscape of the Mercat neighborhood located in the historic center of Valencia is one of the most characteristic places in the history of the city. In the same environment there are emblematic monuments such as the Church of the *Santos Juanes*, the *Lonja de la Seda* and the *Mercat Central* (Corbin, 1990).



Fig. 1. Diagram of the founding churches of the city of Valencia (Source: Barranco, 2022)

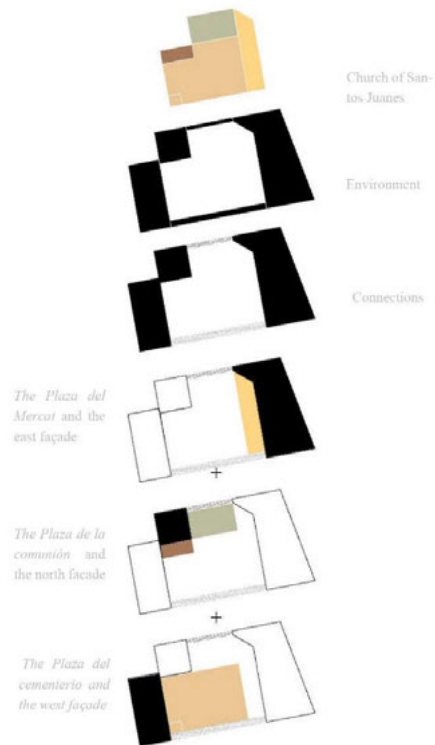


Fig. 2. Plan diagram of the influence of the environment on each of the parts that make up the church. (Source: Barranco, 2022)

for the following reasons: First, both the church and its environment are currently in a process of change, so it is perfect to investigate the perceptive experience of citizens towards the monument and its surroundings.; secondly, in the last 30 years this area has suffered considerable abandonment and depreciation. The lack of a safe urban space, the weak treatment of the urban connections to the monuments and the physical deterioration of the church have been the factors that have caused the generation of an environment conducive to conduct alienating from the place. Vandalism has degenerated the urban landscape, turning the monument into an isolated building with little functionality. This type of behavior, as the environmental psychologist Harold M. Proshansky says, is motivated by an interest in transforming a space that is not considered its own. The concept of "Place-Identity" speaks of how people create attachment relationships with places (Proshansky, 1978). Likewise, Proshansky states that if the inhabited space is not considered as their own, the user does not identify with it and therefore, behaviors oriented towards the lack of appreciation and preservation of the place are encouraged. Consequently, projects have now been initiated for the recovery and urban remodeling of the area.

For the recovery of the value of the monument during its restoration process, an educational proposal is suggested that involves perceptively experiencing the surrounding environment to experience how each urban space contributes to the "patrimonial meaning" of the monument.

The environment that has surrounded the church of Santos Juanes from its construction in the 14th century to the 19th century has been essential for the significance and enhancement of the monument (figure 2). In fact, it is a monument with a certain complexity to perceive it in its entirety. Each of its facades is oriented to a different urban space, for this reason each facade has a different treatment and a different interior-exterior rela-

tionship. The evolutionary analysis of the relationship between the monument and its environment is important to understand the development of its significance by citizens over the years to the present (figure 3). To carry out the study, the interval between 1929 and 2022 has been chosen since it is the period in which the surroundings of the monument of the *Santos Juanes* have constantly changed their morphology, degrading the perceptive experience of it. In the year 1929, the urban landscape is compact and dense, typical of the historic center of the city, as can be seen in figure 4. The voids that surround the monument somehow endow it with meaning. A relationship is established between the monument and the public space. It is a monument embedded within a dense urban fabric, so the perspectives obtained at street level are completely different from different orientations. The monument is shown differently depending on which public space its facade is focused on.

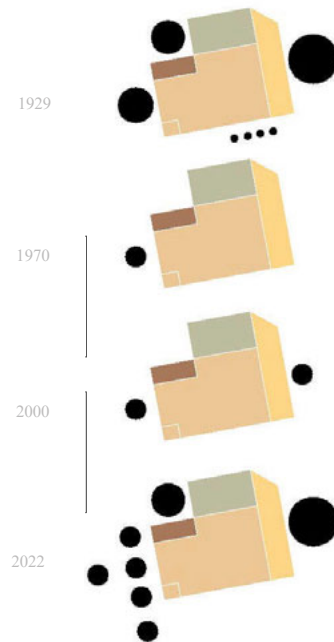


Fig. 3. Diagram of the evolution of urban nodes. (Source: Barranco, 2022)

In the first stage, corresponding to 1929, it can be seen how from the *Plaza del Mercat* the monument appears majestic due to its baroque decoration, standing out within a popular and highly traveled public space (figure 4). The pedestrian character of the square, despite crossing tram lines, allows us to contemplate the cultural wealth that the urban landscape houses. The commercial nature of the square is in the process of disappearing due to the construction of the new central market. The monument continues to contemplate elements that recall this commercial era, it was the volume on the ground floor that was designed in the Baroque era to house shops, which is called "Les Covetes de Sant Joan" (Galarza, 1990). Above these spaces, a terrace is built from which the baroque façade rises. This space overturns the square but at a different level, people with access to the terrace can see the square from a different perspective, above the rest of the citizens. On the same façade, there are two large gates that simulate two large accesses, however, they are not for public access, but for restricted access to the sacristies.

In the second stage, from 1970 the urban scene changes completely with the appearance of the automobile in the historic center of the city (figure 5). The popular and commercial character is gradually lost, degenerating in the quality of public space. During the last 40 years it had been one of the most popular and important squares in the city but it was converted into a parking lot. The relationship between the monument and the square disappears since it cannot be located at a considerable distance from the east façade, it cannot be seen in its entirety. "Les Covetes de Sant Joan" begin to deteriorate as commercial use completely disappears. During this period, the majesty that the monument meant is lost as it cannot be experienced.

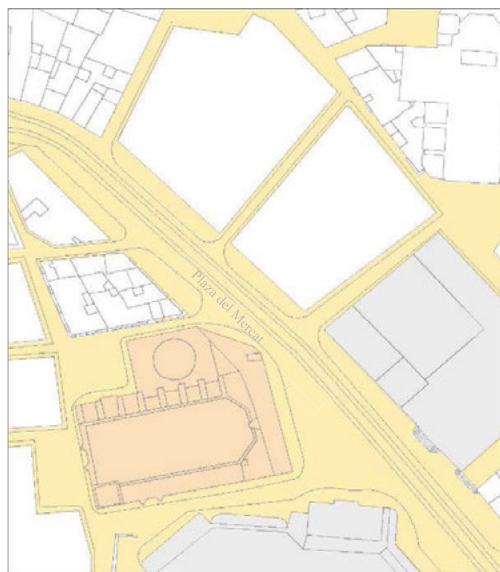


Fig. 4 Floor plan of the area in 1929. In orange, the church of Santos Juanes and in yellow, the pedestrian areas. (Source: Barranco, 2022)

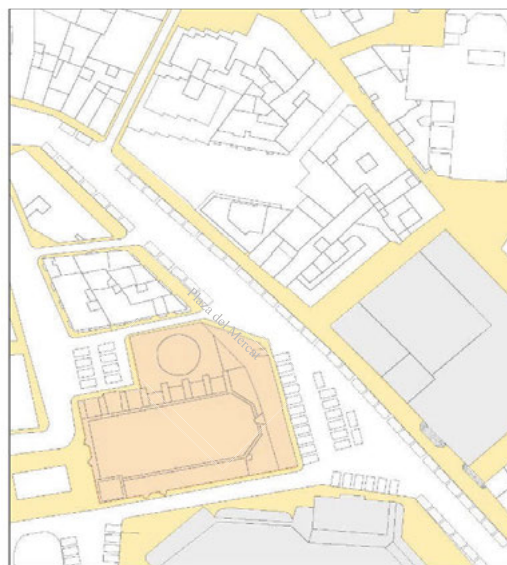


Fig. 5 Floor plan of the area in 1970. In orange, the church of Santos Juanes and in yellow, the pedestrian areas. (Source: Barranco, 2022)

In the third stage, at the beginning of the 21st century, a modification of the traffic of vehicles is carried out, eliminating the parking area and widening the section that focuses on the facade of the monument (figure 6). This change allows in some way to recover the space to perceive the complete east façade. However, it is not enough to recover the popular activity of the non-existent square since it continues to be a traffic sidewalk without establishing areas for stays. *Les Covetes de Sant Joan* are in a state of abandonment, most of them are boarded up and are beginning to be perceived as a place devoid of social and cultural value. This actions generate that alienating behaviors with the place begin to be encouraged.

And finally, both the restoration of the monument and its surroundings are currently being carried out (figure 7). The remodeling that is being carried out in the Plaza del Mercat pedestrianizes the entire surface with which it is intended to recover the perception that it had in origin. The relationship between the public space and the monument is in the process of recovery. *Les Covetes de Sant Joan* is in the restoration phase and a grandstand space will be created to help recover the perception of this volume.

To conclude, it is observed how in the last 50 years the urban the space that has meant the church has been degraded to this day. The figure 3 shows the evolution of the quantity and quality of the urban landscape. The loss of heritage landscape has motivated the urban remodeling of the surroundings, considering it as an opportunity to perceptually experience the monument. Therefore, it is a process of change that must be accompanied by heritage education exercises, to help understand the “heritage meaning” of the monument.

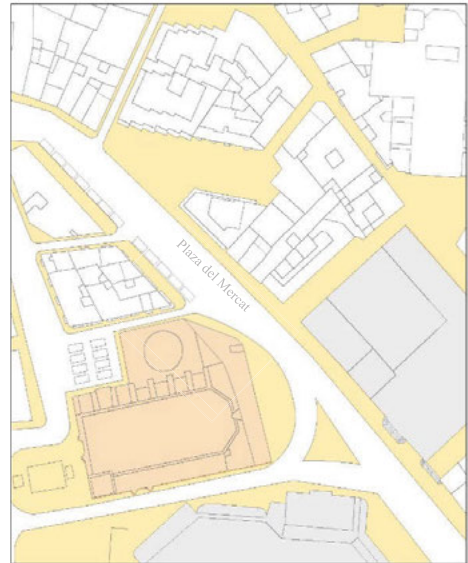


Fig. 6 Floor plan of the area in 2000. In orange, the church of Santos Juanes and in yellow, the pedestrian areas. (Source: Barranco, 2022)

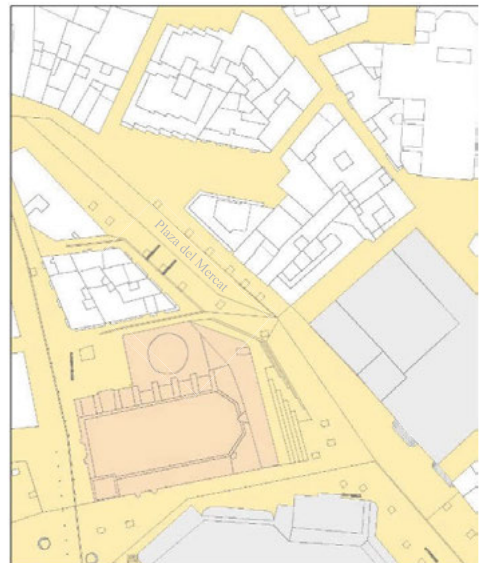


Fig. 7 Floor plan of the area in 2022. In orange, the church of Santos Juanes and in yellow, the pedestrian areas. (Source: Barranco, 2022)

### 3. Heritage education and recovery of “heritage meaning”

During the restoration process of a monument, constructive layers appear that help to understand its history and its meaning. At the end of the urban remodeling around the church, consequently, the monument restoration project began. This moment in which the environment is free to perceptually experience the monument, it is important to carry out heritage education activities that accompany the restoration of the monument. This stage prior to the restored state of the monument is important for its enhancement, since the restoration of this type of monument is a long process over time.

After analyzing the evolution of the environment and determining which urban spaces defined the meaning of the church, an educational tour is proposed to help experience these spaces and understand their relationship with the monument. The route is planned from the outside since it is considered that the monument is under construction. The legibility of the monument from the outside is an important aspect for its recognition and understanding. Through these visits, the unitary image of the whole is strengthened and the diversity of architectural solutions that the monument has depending on which urban space it is oriented to is experienced.

One of the references on heritage education of a similar nature with a high social impact is the proposal "Abierto por obras" in Vitoria, Spain. This is a project to enhance the value of Vitoria Cathedral during its restoration process. The organizers comment that the project stems from people's interest in sharing knowledge with archaeologists, restorers and architects. Therefore, the proposal for the church raises through experience, knowledge and sharing to strengthen the relationship between citizenship and its cultural heritage.

In summary, the proposal is based on creating a space for reflection on the valorization of the cultural heritage of the *Santos Juanes* church, where experiencing its restoration helps raise awareness and learn to value our culture. The activities are oriented towards

citizens and tourists who visit the monument. In relation to the main objective of the proposal, the perspective of each individual on the monument is important to recover its “heritage meaning”.

### 4. Conclusions

To conclude, researching the perceptive experience in historical environments is knowing the “heritage meaning” that citizens attribute to these spaces. In the case study, the degradation of urban space in the last 50 years has caused a loss of its “heritage meaning”. Currently, the restoration process of the *Santos Juanes* church is an opportunity to recover its cultural and social value. It is proposed to carry out heritage education activities that accompany the restoration of the monument in this stage prior to the restored state of the monument. Based on the study of the evolution of the environment and defining the urban landscape that determines the meaning of the church, an educational route is proposed that allows perceptual experience of the relationship between the monument and its heritage landscape.

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