

Both/And: Hybridized Global and Local Identity in Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires

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Introduction

With the increased mobility of capital, culture, products and individuals, the effects of globalization have gained speed and traction in recent decades. Cities, which at one time may have had only minor connections to global networks, are now deeply intertwined with distant, global influences. This is not only true of the larger, more dominant global cities such as New York, London, and Tokyo¹, but it is also increasingly true for a larger set of secondary cities around the globe².

The reality of globalization has strong effects on the physical development of cities. The large sums of money available through global capital and finance have facilitated the growth of larger scale development, often creating entire new areas of a city relatively instantaneously. This scale of growth is often at odds with neighboring city areas that have grown incrementally over time. In addition, these large sums of capital have changed not only the size, but also the grain of development. The base measurement of property is often considered at the scale of the block instead of smaller sized lots. This change in size and scale can potentially contradict local definitions of place, substituting it with globalized visions of development.

Many new globally financed developments in cities cater to an international clientele. These spaces of development are often marketed to a cosmopolitan and affluent audience for purposes of tourism, residence, and commerce. This creates a condition

where the language, distribution, and design of areas are often focused on an elite, mobile, and transient global citizen, by definition not grounded in the locality of place. The image of an area can become an international marketing tool linked to the commodification of location. The 'local' is packaged as an opportunity for branding that promotes tourism and commerce, while arts and entertainment are highlighted as major draws to the international traveler³.

Reading these globally linked areas of urban development strictly as global phenomenon, however, misses a potentially more comprehensive identity and reality. With respect to globalization, physical development plays a unique role in that it is a localized manifestation of the global. While capital and labor may instantaneously shift, physical development is grounded in location. This situation creates a charged condition in which global relationships are tangibly imposed on the local fabric, provoking the interplay between the global and the local.

The intermixing of this local and global condition has often been approached as a combative and confrontational circumstance. Some urbanists consider the local identity to be under siege of global aspirations⁴. Global forces are considered to be powerful, unrelenting, homogenizing, and anonymous. Places, in this rhetoric, have become contested terrains where the battle between the local and the global are played out. With this, the local has been cast as the antithesis of the global and to preserve its identity, local entities and individuals have taken on a

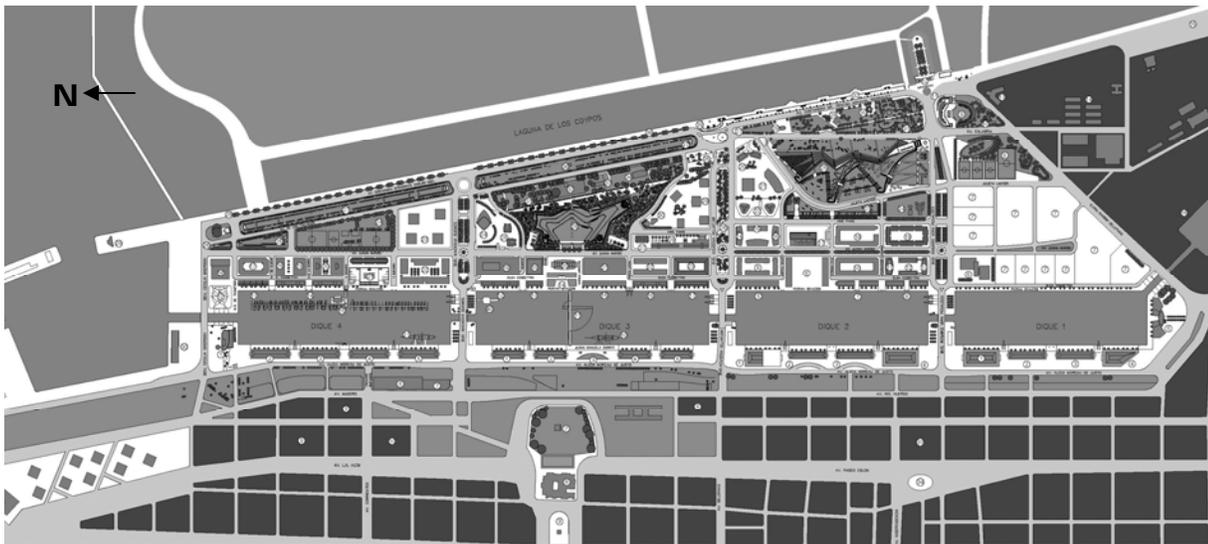


Fig 1. Current plan of Puerto Madero with four large docks separating most of the new development from the steady grid of Buenos Aires. Historic wharf buildings are just below the docks (west), new corporate headquarters are mostly above them (east), and the revitalized Costanera Sur park can be seen diagonally at the top of the plan. (Corporacion Antiguo Puerto Madero)

reactionary and protective stance⁵. The interaction between the local and global may, however, be much more nuanced than the confrontational models propose. Instead of a condition of opposition, it is possible to frame the local and the global as together creating place and identity⁶. This leads to a condition where place needs not be *either* global *or* local, but *both* global *and* local. In this view, 'Globalization does not represent the end of territorial distinctions and distinctiveness,'⁷ but instead globalization broadens the scale of influences that affect identity and place, bringing together the global and the local.

If contemporary urban projects are planned and design with this in mind, they can merge and intertwine local and global identities, providing a means through which a range of interests and identities are represented. The role of the built environment, in both a material sense and as a process, can provide opportunities for a coexistence of the global and local. This coexistence can foster symbiotic relationships in which notions of place are strengthened and benefit from both scales of identity and resources.

This paper looks at the product, process, and narratives associated with the built environment and studies the means through

which hybrid identity can be established. Some of these means touch on the strictly physical and visually legible aspects of tectonics and architectural language while others focus on the physical presence of the site only inasmuch as it is a container for narratives that shape identity. The design/planning process, visual history, global manifestations, naming, and political status/use of the area are all proposed as critical to the development of a hybrid global and local identity.

The subject of study here is not simply the economic/social/political conditions of a place, but also the specific physical ramifications and manifestations of these conditions. If, as suggested by Doreen Massey, place is defined by a network of social connections and can therefore be defined as both global and local simultaneously⁸, what are the actual physical manifestations and associated social and political events/connections that create this reading? This question is investigated through the case study of Puerto Madero, a revitalized former industrial port in the heart of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The case study provides both a guide for understanding the mixing of scales and also acts as a model for future urban and architectural design to be applied in other cities facing similar challenges.

Puerto Madero: A Global Aspiration

The recent re-development of Puerto Madero centers around a late 19th century port which was abandoned in the mid 1940's as the size of shipping vessels grew.⁹ The port is located in the heart of Buenos Aires, a few blocks away from the seat of Argentine power and the economic and financial centers of the city (Fig. 1). After nearly 60 years of disuse and a number of unsuccessful plans for the area, development began in earnest after President Carlos Menem linked the development of the area with his global aspirations for Argentina. For Menem, this centrally located and defunct area was to be transformed into the new landing point for international investment and development, aiding a re-emergence of Argentina on the world stage.

Puerto Madero is a prototypic example of globally inspired and directed development in the contemporary city. After decades of life as a rusty shipyard, Puerto Madero has become a magnet for international investment, a home to transnational corporations, and a strong draw for tourism and the arts. This project has raised the visibility of Buenos Aires and Argentina and much of the projected \$2 billion in direct investment for the project¹⁰ has come from overseas.

While the 'global magnet/engine' view of Puerto Madero is one reality of the area, there is an equally powerful identity of the area that is not focused on international prestige and is instead firmly focused on the local definition of place. The identity of Puerto Madero is based both in transnational visibility *and* local enjoyment, use, and consumption.

Formal Hybridity

Hybridized architectural and urban identity has received increasing attention with the acceleration of globalization. Critical regionalism emerged in the early 1980's as a means of combining the universal and the local through architectural language and tectonics. Critical Regionalism, as defined first by Tzonis and Lefaivre and then later elaborated by Frampton, attempts to

'mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place.' In later writings,

Tzonis and Lefaivre more directly link the notion of universal civilization with the process of globalization¹¹.

Form is of primary interest to critical regionalism and it is the mixing of indigenous and universal formal and construction languages that creates the basis for hybridized identity.

This approach caters to architects and relies heavily on the visual aspects of the built realm. To engage or apply critical regionalism requires principally the act of looking at a place without necessarily understanding a culture beyond visual aspects. Form is seen as a container and representation of culture which can be understood and manipulated: formal hybridization ostensibly precipitating cultural hybridization. While limited, this approach can be very powerful in that the visual language is often legible to all who experience an area and does not rely on a deep cultural or historical familiarity with a place.



Fig. 2. A critical regionalist approach through tectonics and massing seen in both the adaptive reuse of wharf buildings and adjacent new construction.

In Puerto Madero, there are a number of examples where the hybrid definition of the place is read specifically through formal characteristics. The approach towards the historic port buildings on site has not been nostalgic or historicist, but instead employs a critical regionalist stance, interpreting the vernacular architectural language in light of contemporary materials, tectonics, and programs. The wharf buildings have not been restored to their original state but instead the architects interpreted the historic forms and details and modified them to translate the building from a late 19th century warehouse to an early 21st century mixed use building,

letting the old and new, local and global speak simultaneously. This approach to architectural language exists both in the adaptive reuse of the historic buildings and also in the new construction of buildings adjacent to the historic wharfs (Fig. 2).

The architectural language of projects in this area is another way in which hybrid definitions of place are generated through formal avenues. There is a broad range of 'styles' in Puerto Madero that range from more historical examples to cutting edge contemporary designs of steel and glass. What is interesting here is that both of these languages are allowed to speak simultaneously. It was critical to both the developers and government officials to evince the historic legacy of Puerto Madero, making an extensive catalog and study of historic buildings, but at the same time they wanted the language of the buildings in this area to also speak of the global marketplace of imagery. To this end, the first new (not renovated) building in the project, the offices of the development company itself, were consciously designed in a contemporary language. Draped in continuous glass curtain wall and sleek modern lines, the building was meant to set the tone for both the quality and language of new construction.¹² This tone was well received given the highly contemporary language employed in new buildings in the area and the long list of both local and international top architectural designers that have contributed building designs. This list includes HOK and KPF from the United States, Raphael Vignoly and Santiago Calatrava of Spain, and Philippe Stark from France.

The Social Construction of Place and Identity, Beyond Form

While a long line of place theorists have proposed that identity is inherent in a local physical form and materiality,¹³ a new generation of theorists has broadened this definition to include the social construction of place. Theorists such as Dolores Hayden and Doreen Massey have argued that the identity of an area is a mixture between the physical context and the social narratives associated with that context.¹⁴

In her essay 'A Global Sense of Place,' Massey argues that place 'is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular

locus.'¹⁵ With this view, the physical aspects of a site are important in that they provide a location upon which social narratives are mapped. Massey describes a walk down a local street in which signs, individual histories, and an array of global products create the definition of the street by the unique network of connections they suggest. It is the social implications of the physical presence that creates identity.

With the social construction of place as a starting point, globalization is no longer a threat to place and identity, but instead simply broadens the constellation of social relations to links outside of a specific local. Places are therefore processes and can change based on the mix of individuals inhabiting and experiencing them.

Narratives become the critical aspect to the development of identity. As architects and urban designers, it is the discovery, creating, and evincing of narratives that lay the foundation for definition of place. The question then is how to engage narratives in the design of physical places. In Puerto Madero it is exactly the creation and evincing of these narratives that invoke a hybridized local/global identity and make design a social act as much as a physical act.

Hybridity Through the Historic Narrative

As is common in many colonized areas, the historic narratives of a site are often an example of hybridized identities. Historically, this combination of global and local influences has always existed in Buenos Aires. This is true for the layout of the city, its initial development, and its mixing and modifying of European and indigenous cultures. This is also true for the development of Puerto Madero as initial plans were promoted by Eduardo Madero, an Argentinean Engineer and booster, designed by the English engineer, John Hawkshaw, financed by the English Baring brothers, and were based on the powerful ports of London and Liverpool. The wharf buildings which today are considered part of the national heritage were actually designed as part of the original English plan and were built with bricks fabricated in England and shipped to Argentina as ballast for cross Atlantic trading vessels.

What is critical here is that this mixed narrative of the place that combines the identity of the city with its historically foreign influences is well known by the residents of Buenos Aires. It is in the continued telling and re-telling of this narrative through personal interactions, media reports, and published historiographies that the hybrid definition of the place is established. The historic buildings are a presence on the site, but it is the addition of their stories that creates the hybrid identity. This is not simply a formal issue, but instead, as suggested by Hayden and Massey, it is the narratives associated with the form that establishes identity.

Hybridity Through Design/Planning Process

The hybrid identity of Puerto Madero is also present in the well publicized and disseminated story of the area's design and planning. Familiar to a large number of Buenos Aires residents, this narrative of the design process itself is an act of hybridized identity. After President Menem decreed the development of Puerto Madero, a proposal was developed by a Barcelona based group that had been instrumental in that city's recent waterfront redevelopment. When this plan was presented to the city, it was met with vociferous opposition from a wide segment of the city on the grounds that it was being developed without local input and without consideration for local identity and place. The sentiment, as stated during public debates on the proposal, was that the project felt as it had been construed by foreigners who had a 'peculiar and remote vision' of the project.¹⁶

Critics accused the development group of creating an opaque process in which the selection of consultants, the direction they had been given, and the work they were producing was carried out without sufficient public review. In relation to the design itself, many opposed an apparent lack of sensitivity to the local conditions of the area including a lack of importance given to historic buildings, the enclave design of the neighborhood, limited and inaccessible public space, over construction of the area based on maximizing rentable space, and a lack of concern for the ecological conditions of the district.

As a response to this outcry, the Central Society of Architects proposed holding a national ideas competition for the design of Puerto Madero. The call for a competition was a coalescing of dissatisfaction with the project and was based on widespread support for balancing the global aspirations of the project with a shift to local priorities, a concern for local place, and an appreciation for the local identity of the city. It is important to note that only Argentine entries were allowed in this competition, engendering a local response to the project's global aspirations. The competition gave the development process a sense of public input, localized legitimacy, and trust that the development group was addressing the public wellbeing and not simply the needs of a global financial market.¹⁷

Outside of the globalization goals of the development group and the national government, localized goals of public use and identity were also shaping the development of the project. Again, it is the familiarity of this narrative, as communicated through the media and personal interactions, which adds to the hybrid definition of place. This project, as a process, was not to be only global aspirations, but local aspirations as well.

Localized Puerto Madero

The executed plan for Puerto Madero completely reshapes the design of the area with a significant nod towards a locally defined sense of place and the desires of a local audience. This new plan prioritizes meaningful open space that is accessible and congruent with the needs of the local population. The overall constructed area for the project has been drastically reduced from over 3 million square meters in the earlier plan to just over 2 million square meters in this plan. This allows a better distribution and proportion of open spaces around the site and balances the desire for a positive public realm with the need for economic advancement and fiscal responsibility. The space along the docks and specifically the promenade in front of the historic wharf buildings are highlighted as significant public amenities. The plan now includes five story buildings across the docks from the wharf buildings to frame this public space and not overwhelm its scale or create enclave neighborhoods.

The four streets which cross the docks and connect the city to Puerto Madero are designed as large boulevards to facilitate a visual, spatial, and physical union and to minimize feelings of enclave. The east sides of the boulevards terminate in a series of vast parks that are extensions of the Costanera Sur, a large linear park system from the early 20th century. The Costanera Sur was a center of *Porteño* (Buenos Aires) socializing up until the mid 1940's when the pollution of the river along with the mothballing of the adjacent Puerto Madero led to its gradual decline and abandonment.¹⁸

The new plan for Puerto Madero has revitalized the Costanera Sur park system and has allocated significant funds to its renovation and to the establishment of new programming for the area. This area of the development is by far the most democratic, with a range of social classes enjoying the playgrounds, fields, and most importantly the renovated promenade. This promenade is littered with '*Carritos*', small *parillas* (*barbeques*) that operate in a semi-clandestine manner, tolerated by the city but without permits. These are quintessential *porteño* venues where individuals have the '*parilla al paso*' (barbeque to be eaten while walking/passing by/socializing). On the weekends, this area is filled with people eating, talking, and playing in an un-staged, indigenous ritual, recapturing the historic social role of this area as a social collector for a variety of classes. In this, the open space is not a park for a globalized Puerto Madero; instead it is a park for Buenos Aires located in Puerto Madero. Transnational headquarters now lie adjacent to this locally used public space. The local and the global both coexist through the use and design of the public realm.

Hybridized Political Space

In addition to the design of public space, a hybridized identity can also be created through the role of public space as a political arena. The privatization of public space removes it from the local political process. In light of globalization, these privatized spaces can singularly serve an international clientele, negating any local identity. In Puerto Madero, the public spaces are consciously kept in public ownership and therefore carry with them the typical rights of protest,

inhabitation, and congregation. In an ironic mix of capitalism and socialism, Puerto Madero has become a high profile venue for the protection of economically disenfranchised Argentinians. Raul Castells, a local Argentinean social advocate, recently leased a high rent stall in the center of Puerto Madero and placed within it an open air soup-kitchen for anyone in need¹⁹. (Fig. 3)

While the location of this soup-kitchen in this high-end neighborhood does not capture a large in-need demographic, it has caught the attention of both the national and international press, elevating the issue of growing poverty in the country to the global stage. Both the city and the port are understandably uncomfortable with this confrontational protest, but they have been unable to deter it. In this example a local cause has leveraged the global profile of the area to advance its strictly local aims. Because of the role of the public space as an openly political space, the global and the local are intermixed and a hybrid definition of place is further advanced.



Fig 3. 'Global space' localized through politics: Raul Castell's soup kitchen in front of multinational corporate headquarters and Calatrava's bridge. (Dennis Galvan)

Glocal Manifestations

Another example of hybridized global and local narratives infused in physical design can be seen in '*glocalized*' architectural moments. These are moments in which global identities are grounded through localized physical manifestations. A notable example in the middle of Puerto Madero is a bronze statue of an early 19th century racecar driver standing next to his formula one Mercedes-Benz

racecar (Fig. 4). This example is 'glocal' in that the racecar driver is Juan-Manuel Fangio, a well known icon to Argentines that won five world racing titles early in the last century. One of those titles was won in a car sponsored by Mercedes-Benz. The statues of the car and Fangio are located along one of the primary boulevards of Puerto Madero and are oriented towards the doors of a neighboring office building which houses the DaimlerChrysler headquarters of Argentina. DaimlerChrysler is the company that currently owns Mercedes. A local hero, therefore, made famous by his global achievements is linked to the national branch of a transnational corporation. The local and global infused through a single narrative in the creation of meaning.



Fig. 4. A bronze sculpture of Fangio, an Argentine racing hero, shown in front of Daimler-Chrysler's headquarters in Puerto Madero

This same infusion can be seen in the promotion of buildings in Puerto Madero designed by Cesar Pelli. Cesar Pelli is an Argentinean born, world renowned architect

currently based in New Haven, Connecticut. He is a household name in Argentina and his career achievements are often cited in the press. Pelli is currently designing the 40-plus story Argentinean headquarters for the Spanish oil company Repsol/YPF in Puerto Madero. His name is prominently displayed as a calling card on an oversized billboard in front of the construction site. Once again, local and global are brought together as a local hero is linked to the local construction of a national branch of a transnational corporation.

Both of these examples physically materialize single narratives that have both global and local components. The narratives themselves are the hybrid and it is the locating of these narratives on the site that lend a hybridized identity to this place. It is again important to note that the local audience's familiarity with the mixed global/local narrative is critical in establishing the hybrid identity of the place. An outsider might not recognize the significance of the bronze statue or the name on the architectural calling card.

Naming and the Hybridized Narrative

Naming is in itself an act of narration. Giving names to certain areas maps a social construct upon the physical reality. The entirety of Puerto Madero has been given a theme of the celebration of the Argentine woman. This theme is expressed most acutely through the naming of streets and parks throughout the area. All of the streets are named after well known and influential Argentine women. Again, in a mixing of the global and the local, the large majority of the women are known in Argentina in part due to international fame. (Fig. 5)

For example, Azucena Villaflor was the founder of the 'Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo' movement. This movement was a protest of the 1970's military government and its secret detention, torture, and execution of a number of Argentine citizens. Ms. Villaflor organized a group of mothers to walk in the main plaza of Buenos Aires once a week to provide a visual reminder to the citizens and officials of Buenos Aires that their sons and daughters had been illegally taken and still remain unaccounted for. Again, in an ironic twist of global and local influences, this movement continues today and has gained considerable

strength through an organized effort to publicize its cause internationally.

By naming streets, plazas, and parks after such women, the area constantly references local identities. While some might argue that naming seems a shallow addition to the identity of a place, it is helpful to imagine an alternative condition for Puerto Madero where the streets are named after transnational corporations (IBM Boulevard or AT&T Way) or named after famous international individuals (Milton Friedman Street or Louis Pasteur Lane). Both examples foster an identity which is divorced from the locale and devoid of local meaning. Referencing mixed local and global narratives through the act of naming contributes to the hybrid identity of place.



Fig. 5. Streets and parks in Puerto Madero are named after internationally famous Argentine women, adding a mixed global and local narrative to the identity of place.

Conclusion

Puerto Madero is an excellent example of hybridized global and local influences together shaping the identity of a place. On the one hand it embodies global aspirations and the promotion of a transnational economy. On the other, it has remained rooted in its locale, not for the sake of tourism and the necessary 'authentication', but instead in reaction to public pressure to create a place that meets the needs and desires of the residents of Buenos Aires, a place that extends the identity of the city and does not simply extort or negate it. While this model may not exist in all or even many cities that have reached for global scale visibility, it does provide a prototype of how global and local influences can coexist in a symbiotic relationship. This hybridized identity is achieved through both

the physical design of the area and through the narratives associated with the physical reality.

While architects are often overly seduced by the formal aspects of our medium, it is important to note that the narratives associated with the physical presence of a place are critically important to its definition. As described by Massey, giving weight to narrative allows the existence of hybridized global and local identities. To create hybridized identities, as architects and urban designers we must recast the ways in which we understand place to incorporate narratives and we must focus on ways in which our physical medium can help evince and evoke them.

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