

Heterotopic Pocket Spaces through Intermittent Occupancy

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Abstract

In the contemporary context of a profound crisis of public spaces in general, and the Portuguese context in particular, questions of intensive ‘touristification’, fast gentrification, and concentrated immigration are reshaping the use and values of traditional urban spaces. The introduction of new public actors, new communities, and associated different social practices, often lead to feelings of estrangement of the public space, as well as to the emergence of different intermittent uses of public space. In this context we aim to discover different formal and social conditions of space especially within ‘off-map’ places whose use and value are currently being rediscovered and/or shifted.

In this article, we propose a new approach to public space as a threefold notion based on: (1) the idea of Pocket spaces, (2) Foucault’s heterotopia and (3) intermittent occupation. We analyse fifteen different potential heterotopic pocket spaces from a threefold perspective composed by the (1) morphological qualities of pocket spaces, (2) the socio-spatio-temporal relationships of Foucault’s heterotopia and (3) the social use based on the capacity of the space to accommodate different uses and practices.

We argue that, due to its complexity and ability to embrace contradictions and conflicts, heterotopic pocket spaces can be used as a valuable concept for describing, analysing, and creating speculative designs for a more democratic city, embracing and re-signifying possible estrangement of the public space in the contemporary, everchanging context.

Keywords: *heterotopia, urban pocket spaces, intermittent occupancy, public space*

Heterotopic Pocket Spaces

Complexity of contemporary public space is challenging to describe, and it cannot be approached from a one-dimensional only point of view, formal, social, or relational - it requires a comprehensive reading strategy.

While urban morphology can quite clearly describe qualities of the formal dimension of traditional public spaces, the permanently evolving social dimension is more challenging to address. Questions such as of touristification, immigration and social discrepancies are being exposed and becoming evident in the nowadays occupation of public spaces. Negotiation of spatial occupation occurs on various levels and is commonly visible in traditionally recognised and mapped public places. These encounters, as a representation of permanent spatial negotiations between different actors, are bringing certain theatrical qualities to the use of the city as we observe each other from a distance. One finds oneself exposed.

Differently, less known out-of-touristic-map and untraditionally generated public spatial pockets, are emerging in different, less described, and unexpected locations hosting spontaneous community-orientated uses. These emerging spaces are relevant for social cohesion and well-functioning society in terms of interpersonal dynamics and/or collective efforts (Qi, Mazumdar and Vasconcelos, 2024). These spaces can function as “third places” of “great good places” between home and work, the core of a

community's social vitality as designated by (Oldenburg, 1999). Moreover they can work as “fourth place” as defined by (Simões Aelbrecht, 2016), lively and inclusive public spaces, characterised by its social openness beyond social comfort and their capacity to bring strangers together.

Taking into consideration the need for a comprehensive spatial reading and based on empirical observation of 15 public spaces in Lisbon, we propose a descriptive matrix for the description of emerging public spaces. We address these out-of-touristic-map pockets, as heterotopic pocket spaces and define them from a threefold perspective:

1. morphology (based on the definition of pocket spaces)
2. socio-spatio-temporal relationships (based on Foucault’s heterotopic principles)
3. social use (based on their capacity to accommodate intermittent practices)



Definition of Pocket Spaces

“Pocket is a kind of small bag which forms part of a piece of clothing, and which is used for carrying small things such as money or a handkerchief.”; however, the definition goes on, and includes an idea of “a pocket of something” and as “a small area where something is happening, or a small area which has a particular quality, and which is different from the other areas around it.”.¹

In literature, science fiction and fantasy, the pocket spaces can mean small, hidden, or magical dimensions or realms. These are often used in stories to represent secret or additional storage areas, hidden worlds, or alternate realities that exist alongside the main world. One of the most illustrative examples of pocket space as realm of infinite possibilities is Borges’ Aleph: “the only place on earth where all places are [...] all lamps, all sources of light are in it.” (Borges, 1971) In his “The Poetics of Space”, Gaston Bachelard delves into the intimate spaces of our lives such as those: “...of a hut, of a nest, or of nooks and corners in which he would like to hide away, like an animal in its hole...” (Bachelard, 1994), which metaphorically can be extended to the idea of pockets considering it as a small, personal world carrying our private thoughts and treasures. Junichiro Tanizaki’s “In Praise of Shadows” (Tanizaki, 1977) apart from primarily dealing with Japanese aesthetics and the beauty of shadows, implicitly discusses the significance of small, contained spaces and how they contribute to our experience of the world. This can be interpreted to include the idea of a pocket as a miniature, intimate space of its own.

¹ Examples given by Collins English Dictionary: “He survived the earthquake after spending 3 days in an air pocket.” And “The army controls the city apart from a few pockets of resistance.” <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pocket> consulted on 11th of May 2024

Regarding the application of pocket spaces in urban design practice, Kimmel describes them as social thresholds and negotiation space. She gives an example of small wire-separated areas of Refugee Cricket Project (East Croydon, London) designed by Muf architecture+art, a London-based practice². These small areas primarily intended for young refugees allowed anyone from the neighbourhood to come, watch the cricket game and engage with the teams. It was unpolished, low cost and temporary, public space that was a threshold between communities. Another quality of pocket spaces is that they are negotiation spaces, where different actors negotiate presence and movement. The author recognizes these negotiation spaces in skating areas of parks where small size skating platforms are pocket spaces and surrounding area are thresholds between semi-private skating area and public space. (Kimmel, 2021 pp.119-120).

Thus, pocket spaces refer to different concepts depending on the context they are applied at. In urban planning and architecture, pocket spaces refer to small areas within a city or urban environment, like pocket parks or public squares. They provide green space, relaxation areas, or pedestrian-friendly environments within a dense urban setting. In the “Architecture of threshold spaces: a critique of the ideologies of hyperconnectivity and segregation in the socio-political context” (Kimmel, 2021) describes pocket spaces “as an architecturally defined place of social interactions in public space, such as an ‘open urban room’ where people linger³” (2021, p.116, par.1) and they are commonly localized at the margins of main paths in less accessible areas⁴.

Foucault’s Heterotopia and Socio-spatio-temporal Relationships

The understanding of heterotopia necessarily implies the understanding of utopia. The prefix “hetero” designates “different”, while the prefix “u”, from the Greek “ou” means “not”, or, also from the Greek “eu”, which means “good”; in other words: utopias are unreal places (good, as opposed to dystopias), heterotopias are “other”, different places (*Des Espaces Autres*). The word “utopia” is used for the first time in 1516, as the title of the influential book by Sir Thomas Moore, which describes a perfect society, in opposition to the English court of the time. The word “heterotopia” is first used by Michel Foucault four hundred and fifty-one years later. In fact, before naming heterotopias as such, Foucault presented the concept under the name of “localized utopias”⁵ which, despite being a contradiction, is very suggestive: “real places situated outside all other spaces destined to efface, to neutralize, to compensate or purify the spaces they oppose.”⁶ The concept of heterotopia, was introduced by Foucault on a lecture in 1966 and, having gained significant protagonism, published in several versions and various translations⁷.

The notion of Heterotopia has inspired diverse interpretations of complex and conflicting contemporary public spaces. In her chapter “The many mirrors of Foucault and their architectural reflections” Boyer (2008) criticizes architects for, given the fascination with the concept developed by Foucault, reducing heterotopic space to “any autonomous fragment set in opposition to the compositional totalization of the city” (p. 64, par.4). There are several works that overpass this reductionism by introducing the intrinsic quality of ‘otherness’ in understanding public space. In their analysis of urban margins Wallace and

² “Muf base their project designs on concepts around the resolution of social conflicts. They primarily work for people in social minorities so that they can be present in, and use public space, interacting with other communities.”

³ Laurence Kimmel uses the example of Yokohama Ferry Terminal

⁴ Public space of the Oslo Opera House

⁵ “The many mirrors of Foucault and their architectural reflections” Boyer, 2016; from *Heterotopia and the City, Public Space in post-civil society* first published in 2008 by Routledge

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ Here we use the translation of Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, from *Heterotopia and the City, Public Space in a post-civil society* by the same authors, first published in 2008 by Routledge

Stalcup, (2022) use heterotopy to grasp the visibility of adjacent spaces and how individuals perform when they are visible, revealing how they comprehend themselves in relation to others. Soja, (1996) employs the heterotopy in his definition of “Thirdspace” and deconstructing traditional spatial dialectic between real and imagined space. Based on the reading of Foucault’s heterotopia, Tekinalp and Şentürer, (2024) created seven-step view lens for analysis of public space regarding presence of different identities that coexist with others.

Instead of reducing heterotopic spaces to fragments, in this work, we propose to start precisely from the opposite, that is, from the idea of “compositional totality of the city”. We evoke heterotopia as quality that instead of discretising space into parts, puts into a relationship diversities and oppositions of the city as a whole. Starting from compositional totality of a city we define heterotopic pocket spaces by looking not only at the pocket itself but the socio-spatio-temporal fabric in which the pocket is tailored.

In his text, Foucault introduces six principles:

1st Principle of Crisis or Deviation

Heterotopias often house individuals experiencing crises or those considered deviant. In earlier societies, these spaces might be reserved for rites of passage, such as puberty, marriage, or pregnancy. In contemporary times, they tend to house those who deviate from the established (societal) norms, like prisons or psychiatric hospitals. Nowadays, there is a cultural obligatoriness for inclusion that almost cancels any possibility for deviation, as deviation ought to be accepted. In urban-architectural practices the principle of so-called crisis or deviation are nowadays evident in the contexts of queer spaces (Doan, 2007) or those of people that are houseless and occupy public spaces by temporarily shelters. In the case of Lisbon, in the garden António Feijó, next to the Church of Nossa Senhora dos Anjos, houseless people are not necessarily unemployed but have chosen provisional shelters as answers to high cost of living space rents.



Fig. 1. Jardim António Feijó
<https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/fact-check/imagem-de-tendas-que-servem-de-abrigo-a-dezenas-de-pessoas-junto-a-igreja-em-lisboa-e-real/>



Fig. 2. Marvila 8
<https://www.8marvila.com/gallery>

2nd Principle of Functional Variation Over Time

The function of heterotopias can evolve with time and cultural shifts. For instance, cemeteries were historically central to communities, and thus placed at city centres, but later moved to city outskirts due to changing conception of health and death. This principle indicates that the meaning and role of heterotopias is deeply rooted on their context. In the contemporary urban-architectural practice this principle is being widely explored. Such an example is Marvila 8 project, situated in Lisbon, which is an on-going ephemeral initiative that transformed 22.000 m² of the old Abel Pereira da Fonseca wine warehouses, a city landmark, retaining their original space delineations created by the wine cellars. The "8" symbolizes the space's reuse, as Marvila 8 has refurbished the distinctive façade and embraced a reuse philosophy, repurposing over half of the rubble, wood, iron, and sheet metal, including the warehouse counters.

3rd Principle of Juxtaposition of Incompatible Spaces

Heterotopias can contain or juxtapose various spaces that wouldn't normally coexist. A theatre stage can depict multiple locations within a single play, while a garden can symbolize a microcosm of the world and represent an ideal of Eden. This principle reveals how heterotopias can bring together contrasting spaces within one setting. This juxtaposition nowadays seems less invasive as limits between categories such as for example those between sacred and profane blur (see an example of Kruisherhotel Maastricht in Netherlands).



Fig. 3. Kruon Gallery & Kruisher Hotel Maastricht
<https://maastrichtgalleryweekend.nl/author/johan/>

4th Principle of Heterochronism (Link to Time)

Some heterotopias are linked to different concepts of time. Cemeteries represent a kind of timelessness, whereas museums and libraries are heterotopias where time accumulates through historical artifacts and records. This principle highlights how these spaces can create a very singular relationship with time, either as static or constantly evolving. As an outcome, heterotopic spaces also culminate in a rupture with current or traditional time.

5th Principle of Conditioned or Restricted Access (Opening and Closing)

Heterotopias often have specific systems for access and control. They can be restricted with barriers or require rituals and permissions for entry, like prisons or religious sites. This principle acknowledges that access to heterotopias is often regulated, creating a sense of separation from everyday spaces.

<https://maastrichtgalleryweekend.nl/author/johan/>

6th Principle of Function as Illusion or Compensation

Heterotopias can serve to create a space of illusion or compensation. As illusions, they can reflect the illusory nature of societal norms (like brothels, which offer an alternative to mainstream society). As spaces of compensation, they can offer a more ordered or idealized environment compared to the real world (like utopian colonies or carefully planned gardens, such as Persian). This principle suggests that heterotopias function as a critique or provide an alternative to conventional societal structures.

Intermittent Practices as Heterotopic Pocket Uses

Apart from the ideas of pocket spaces and heterotopias we introduce the notion of intermittent practices which are the validation of existence of heterotopic pocket spaces. We observed the use of these public spaces through the lens of “**Intermittent Practices**”⁸, as defined by Allegrì and Ochoa (2021) that refer to temporary and flexible activities or uses of urban spaces that deviate from traditional, permanent arrangements. These practices are characterised by their adaptability and responsiveness to changing urban needs and conditions and emphasise values of temporariness and sharing, reflecting broader socio-economic, political, and technological shifts. These new and unconventional dynamics are emerging in various forms: housing models (co-living, co-housing, temporary accommodation); work arrangements (co-working, remote work); shared mobility (bike-sharing, car-sharing); shared goods and services (creative commerce, Netflix, Spotify); spontaneous cultural events; and innovative uses of spaces (parties in abandoned buildings, urban agriculture in vacant lots) (ibid.).

In Search for Heterotopic Pocket Spaces

Taking into consideration the morphological characteristics of pocket spaces and relational aspects of heterotopic spaces proposed by Foucault we examined fifteen different spaces of the Metropolitan area

⁸ <https://intermittentcity.fa.ulisboa.pt> consulted on May 17, 2024

of Lisbon. We considered the properties descriptive of pocket spaces such as: marginal positioning, low accessibility, and small area in comparison to surrounding urban tissue and the 6 principles of Foucault's heterotopias. In these fifteen different spaces, we further analysed the existence or absence of intermittent practices and the triggers that initiated them.

In the table we observe a set of diverse open public spaces that are recognized and mapped by Ochoa and Allegri as places for intermittent practices. These places host different functions (social, economic, cultural, etc.) that occur in different intervals (yearly, weekly, daily, irregularly) and are initiated by different actors (municipality, small entrepreneurs, community groups, squatters citizens, etc.).



Fig. 4. collection of examples for analysis; 1st two rows from <https://intermittency.fa.ulisboa.pt>; 3rd row, 1st and 2nd author's photographs and google maps.

marginal positioning	yes*	yes*	no	no	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes	yes	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes	yes
low accessibility or protagonism	yes*	yes*	no	no	yes	yes*	yes*	yes	yes	yes*	yes*	yes	yes	yes	yes
small area, different from surroundings	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
crisis or deviation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
functional variation over time	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes	yes*	yes*	yes	no	no	no	no	no
juxtaposition of incompatible spaces	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes*	yes	yes*	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no
break with traditional time	yes	yes	yes	yes*	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes*	yes	yes	yes*	yes*	yes*
conditioned or restricted access	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes*	no	yes*	yes*	yes*
illusory or compensatory functioning	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no
intermittent trigger initiative	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no
intermittent practices	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes
when	yearly (aug.)	weekly (sat.)	irregular	irregular	weekly	daily	weekly	daily	weekly (sat.)	irregular	-	-	-	-	-
where	leisure	cultural, art	mobility	service, cultural	working, leisure, service	activ. com. use	cultural leisure, service	working, leisure	activ. com. use	activ. com. use	-	-	-	-	-
who uses	society realm	society realm	society realm	society realm	society realm	society realm	society realm	soc. realm	society realm	soc. realm	-	-	-	-	-
who does	municipality	small entrepreneurs	municipality	community group	community group	squatters citizen	community group	small entrepreneurs	citizens activism	community group	-	-	-	-	-
why	social	economical	cultural, social	cultural, social	cult., soc.,econ	eco., cultural	social, cultural	economical	eco., cultural	social, cultural	-	-	-	-	-
how	subversion	appropriation	appropriation	subversion	appropriation	appropriation	appropriation	coex., netw.	appropriation	propelling	-	-	-	-	-
catalyst	water	old books	traffic stop	cultural activists.	food	plants	play	craft design	trees	exchange	-	-	-	-	-
space	public park	public street	public square	priv. building	priv. build.	public street	pub. park	private building	public space	pub. space	pub. sq.	pub. sq.	pub. square	pub. square	pub. sq.

1 intermittent city's* heterotopic pocket spaces

11 potential heterotopic pocket spaces

pocket spaces

heterotopia

intermittent city*

Heterotopic Pocket Space + Intermittent Practices

In the first example, the beach in jardim do Torel, Lisbon, the use or intermittent practice takes place one month per year, namely in August, and occurs in this public garden and viewpoint. Since 2014, a part of the garden is transformed into a beach with sand and sun umbrellas brought in, and the 18th century tank is filled with water enjoyed by the public.



Fig. 5. from <https://intermittency.fa.ulisboa.pt/praiado-torel/>

This heterotopic pocket space is situated in the centre of Lisbon, yet it is of low accessibility and has controlled opening and closing times. To access this beach in the garden one must go through different spatial transitions, such as sinuous streets, or an overwhelming staircase that goes through a yard of a primary school. Apart that, this garden is 'different', or 'other' as explained by Foucault⁹; since, like all gardens, the meaning of their existence and creation comes from a need for the representing the paradise on earth, of nature in the city (natural environment vs. built environment). The principles of juxtaposition of incompatible spaces and illusory or compensatory functioning are especially interesting here. On the first one, the desire of having a beach in the middle of the city, literally (since the viewpoint-garden of Torel allows for a panoramic view of the city), is in itself quite incompatible with the garden's situation in the city, usually, (in the case of Lisbon, Barcelona, etc.) when there are beaches near the city, they are located at its borders, never, geometrically or geographically in the middle, as is the case in this occupation.

This garden is already both a pocket space and a heterotopy, however, what enhances these characteristics, and truly turns it into a heterotopic pocket space is its intermittent occupancy, the desire of intermittently turning it into a beach.

Heterotopic Pocket Space - Intermittent Practices

Heterotopic pocket spaces where intermittent practices don't occur, are only *potential* heterotopic pocket spaces, left-over, marginal space. Like heterotopic pocket spaces, their morphology is linked to the fact that these spaces are rather small spaces, and different from their surroundings: this relates to their shape, scale, and dimensions. This aspect is linked with Foucault's principle of restricted or conditioned access since the access of these heterotopic pocket spaces is what segregates (restricts and conditions) them from their surroundings – not exactly in Foucault's visualization of restriction, the one that demands a permission (ritualistic, religious, legal) – rather in urban-architectural terms, in the way our bodies are influenced



Fig. 4. author's photograph

⁹ *Des Espaces Autres* (Foucault, 1984)

by built space, the morphology of the access of these spaces is what restricts and conditions them (Hillier *et al.*, 1984, p. ix)¹⁰.

The morphology of potential pocket spaces also contemplates the morphology of their access, as we understand this as being a crucial part of them: namely, because, by differing in scale, dimension and sometimes in shape, they evoke the principle of restricted or conditioned access, the perception of being in some *other* space. Thus, their morphology is indissociable from the built space that contains them: they do not have a specific shape (they rather vary in shape) and do not correspond to any typology.

Use, or rather, lack of use, is the major characteristic of *potential* heterotopic pocket spaces, and is what ultimately differentiates them from heterotopic pocket spaces. Unlike the latter, characterised, as seen previously, by an occupation, these are rests¹¹, remaining, located in the back façades of buildings, commonly occupied by parked cars and garbage cans¹², this is, they haven't yet been occupied by people, they are exempt of activity.

Final Considerations

The search for an explanation regarding these by us called heterotopic pocket spaces, originally came from an empirical observation of neglected, marginal spaces. A link with Foucault's heterotopia was very helpful, since it exemplified how space can function as a tool for embracing contradictions and conflicts rising from the contemporary crisis of public space (neglected space vs. over-exposed and 'touristified' space). However, heterotopic pocket spaces are not merely conditioned by morphology (pocket spaces' qualities) nor socio-spatio-temporal relations (heterotopia's qualities), they need a social use, without which they cannot be considered as such. The social use (occupation: appropriation, subversion) is ultimately the clue for differentiation between heterotopic pocket spaces and *potential* heterotopic pocket spaces. The study carried by Intermittent City is very relevant, since it shows how people perceive and therefore project themselves in the space (often, but not always pocket spaces) they inhabit, giving a hint of what they think is missing in their city (Foucault's principles). This analysis clarifies how use (occupancy, appropriation, subversion) is crucial for understanding the concept of [intermittently occupied] heterotopic pocket spaces, since without it, this activation of neglected and marginal spaces, doesn't occur.

Finally, we argue that this result (combining these three different frameworks: morphological, socio-spatio-temporal, and social use) provides a comprehensive tool for operating in towns and cities suffering from excessive tourism, fast gentrification, and loss of character – such as in the Metropolitan area of Lisbon, Portugal.

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¹⁰ "By giving shape and form to our material world, architecture structures the system of space in which we live and move. In that it does so, it has a direct relation — rather than a merely symbolic one — to social life, since it provides the material preconditions for the patterns of movement, encounter and avoidance which are the material realization — as well as sometimes the generator — of social relations." (Hillier, *et al.*, 1984, p. ix).

¹¹ "The space of rest is always also the space for the rest, for what has to remain hidden" (Dehaene *et al.*, 2016., p.94)

¹² "I want to suggest a different logic of the ruin, which is not romantic, not baroque, not melancholic, but a form of toleration of disharmony — a toleration of plural 'modernities' with which we live." (Boym, 2014, in Pailos-Otero *et al.*, 2016, p.77)

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