

# Musical territories and territorialities: conceptualizing the appropriations of public space by music

Territórios e territorialidades musicais: conceituando as apropriações do espaço público pela música

Territorios y territorialidades musicales: conceptualizando las apropiaciones del espacio público por la música

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### **Abstract**

In the current sonic empowerment scenario, stemming from the ease of access to sound technologies of significant power, it is proposed to understand the influence of music on urban dynamics through its interpretation not only as an immaterial spatiality in the sonic dimension but also as a socio-spatial practice with material implications. This interpretation suggests that, beyond configuring itself as a landscape element, musical practices delineate territories in public space, establishing power relations while presenting themselves as artistic-cultural elements. Conflicts and negotiations in the use of space arise from this characteristic, making it conducive to understanding and proposing a new episteme that enables the analysis of this music-urban space



relationship. The musical Territory emerges as a critical concept in this episteme, encompassing both the nature of cultural spaces and sound's impermanent and temporal nature. It is suggested that this Territory arises from territorialities directly related to the actors involved in the production and reception of musical practice. This territoriality can promote either a positive impact, enhancing the quality, or a negative one, characterized by disputes, on space.

**Keywords:** Music; Territory; Public Space; Territoriality; Urban Culture.

#### Resumo

No presente cenário de empoderamento sonoro, fruto da facilidade de acesso à tecnologias de potência sonora significativa, propõe-se compreender a influência da música nas dinâmicas do urbano por meio de sua leitura não só como uma espacialidade imaterial, na dimensão sonora, mas também material, como uma prática socioespacial. Esta leitura sugere que, mais do que se configurar e como elemento paisagístico, as práticas musicais dimensionam territórios no espaço público, estabelecendo relações de poder enquanto se apresentam como elemento artístico-cultural. Conflitos e negociações no uso do espaço surgem dessa característica, sendo propícia, para sua compreensão, a proposta de uma nova episteme que possibilite analisar essa relação música-espaço urbano. O território musical surge como conceito-chave nesta episteme, contemplando tanto a natureza dos espaços de cultura quanto a natureza impermanente e temporal do som. Sugere-se que esse território provém de territorialidades que se relacionam diretamente com os atores envolvidos na produção e recepção da prática musical. Essa territorialidade pode promover um impacto positivo, de qualificação, ou negativo, de disputas sobre o espaço.

Palavras-chave: Música; Território; Espaço público; Territorialidade; Cultura Urbana.

#### Resumen

En el actual escenario de empoderamiento sonoro, derivado de la facilidad de acceso a tecnologías de sonido de gran potencia, se propone entender la influencia de la música en la dinámica urbana a través de su interpretación no solo como una espacialidad inmaterial en la dimensión sonora, sino también como una práctica socioespacial con implicaciones materiales. Esta interpretación sugiere que, más allá de configurarse como un elemento paisajístico, las prácticas musicales delimitan territorios en el espacio público, estableciendo relaciones de poder mientras se presentan como elementos artístico-culturales. Conflictos y negociaciones en el uso del espacio surgen de esta característica, lo que hace propicio, para su comprensión, proponer una nueva episteme que permita analizar esta relación música-espacio urbano. El territorio musical emerge como un concepto clave en esta episteme, abarcando tanto la naturaleza de

los espacios culturales como la naturaleza impermanente y temporal del sonido. Se sugiere que este territorio surge de territorialidades directamente relacionadas con los actores involucrados en la producción y recepción de la práctica musical. Esta territorialidad puede promover un impacto positivo, mejorando la calidad, o uno negativo, caracterizado por disputas, en el espacio.

Palabras clave: Música; Territorio; Espacio público; Territorialidad; Cultura urbana.

#### Introduction

he relationship between humans and the acoustic environment, consolidated in the perception of the soundscape<sup>1</sup>, has historically been constructed through mutual influences and transformations. In this movement, musical practices have been recurring sonic manifestations in urban centers (Herschmann; Fernandes, 2014; Johnson, 2018; Tinhorão, 2013), altering the city experience of those who inhabit, circulate, and produce sounds (Doumpa, 2012). Currently, these practices are in a new stage of empowerment, marked by the digitization of sound and music (De Notaris; Savonardo, 2022), streaming (Maasø; Hagen, 2020), and the democratization of access to sound devices such as headphones and speakers due to their affordability and portability, resulting in an almost ubiquitous listening of music throughout the city (Kassabian, 2013). This sonic empowerment is present at a moment of re-signification of urban spaces triggered both by postmodern values and technologies and by urban policies that value the instrumental use of culture (Oliveira, 2008) as a way of qualifying space (through processes of revitalization, requalification, renovation, restructuring, rehabilitation), reflecting in the multi-territoriality (Haesbaert, 2007) present in these spaces. In these spaces, overlapping layers of immaterial spatialities confer metageographies for multiple city experiences (Di Felice, 2009).

In this context, music is not only part of the immaterial spatialities that make up the urban acoustic environment, but it also integrates the material space of the city as a social practice carried out in space equivalent to the act of "musicking," as proposed by Small (1998, p. 9): "to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing performance material (what is called composing), or by dancing". This "musicking" directly implies the construction of territories and places (Reily, 2021) where this practice materializes, indicating the need to go beyond the aesthetic-sonorous value of music to address its role in the city, also considering its relationship with the built environment that supports it and the people involved in its realization.

<sup>1</sup> Unlike Schafer (1994), who assumes the terms acoustic environment and soundscape to be interchangeable, the conceptual distinction proposed in the soundscape standard ISO 12913-1 is adopted, where the former refers to sound from all sound sources reaching a given receiver, and the latter corresponds to the perception of the former by a listener in context (International Organization for Standardization, 2014).



Public policies supported by noise control (World Health Organization, 2018) and the field of Soundscape (Kang, 2021) have neglected essential aspects of music in urban space, such as its materiality, conflicts and consensuses, and sociocultural particularities, reducing it exclusively to its sonic dimension. To address this complex relationship between music and urban space, it is crucial to establish a new conceptual basis that considers its dynamics, the power relations involved, and the influence of the identities of different musical actors (Sampaio, 2024). While noise control fails to deal with the diversity and complexity of musical practices in the city, the Soundscape approach disregards particularities of the relationships between musicians, repertoires, and listeners (Kang, 2023). Facing these issues, the article has a critical-propositional character. It suggests the need to address music in urban space from the perspective of Territory, based on the premise that the territorialities of musical actors are consolidated in the material and acoustic appropriation of urban space, focusing on this process of territorialization beyond auditory perception. The objective is to present and discuss theoretical conjectures to propose the concept of "musical territory" through a narrative literature review (Rother, 2007), approached in a multidisciplinary way through the fields of Geography, Music, Soundscape, Architecture and Urbanism, and Communication.

#### Positioning music in territories and territorialities

Territory is conceptualized by Schlee *et al.* (2009) as a social construct in which landscape objects become elements of appropriation that delimit boundaries and symbolic borders, incorporating economic and productive processes, defining strategies of domination over space and its resources, and making space a substrate for cultural identity markers of different individuals and collectives. Musical practices are part of these landscape objects, whose territorialities imply a fluid, flexible, and ephemeral territorial dynamic given the temporal nature of sound, a characteristic of postmodernity (Harvey, 2008). Regarding this scenario, La Barre (2014, p. 43) asserts that: "Places become ambivalent signifiers of an empty structure, characterized precisely by the absence of a predetermined function," resulting in a "pre-coding of the place as a multifunctional place, made of diverse affordances that will allow for a multiplicity of territorialities, all considered, however, as provisional and flexible." Thus, this author questions an assumed cause-effect relationship between sound and its spatialization:

Sonic territories are not informed by sound (or music) itself, as if they were a kind of "black box" ready to be decoded to reveal some secret about social reality. Much more, sonic territories arise from the flexible contexts of contemporary representation, staging, and instrumentalization (La Barre, 2014, p. 52).

Approaching the sonic dimension from this perspective, the Soundscape proposal to treat sounds as "resources" used in urban projects to regulate perceptions about their spaces (Kang, 2021, 2023; Kang; Schulte-Fortkamp, 2016) appears contradictory. By focusing exclusively on the sound material and its listening, this view neglects essential particularities to characterize and analyze musicking as it is treated as any other sound source, as observed in the taxonomy of sounds proposed by ISO 12913-2 (International Organization for Standardization, 2018). This non-differentiation of music from other anthropophonic sources<sup>2</sup> makes its cultural, affective, historical, economic, and political values invisible. This general treatment of musical practices result in dubiously positive statements about the effects of music on the soundscape, such as the fact that music or "musical sound" can stimulate the liveliness of the space, creating stimulating soundscapes (Sun et al., 2019) without considering any correlation with the use and the sociocultural issue of the space. Another example is the proposal to install invisible speakers in open spaces playing music or organize musical events in these spaces to "enhance" their soundscapes (Jo; Jeon, 2020). Without considering the different possible relationships between musical practice, the listener, and the acoustic environment, which can be harmful and conflictual in many cases. In this way, this reduction of music to the sound source ends up suppressing the complexity of the relationships between those who "musick" and their surroundings, which often reveal themselves as multipolar and ambiguous, as observed by Trotta (2018), who states that the relationship of the residents around Praça São Salvador (Rio de Janeiro), and the musicians of the square:

[...] varies according to the position of the apartment in relation to the sound, the resident's degree of affective proximity to the music played, as well as other factors such as age, gender, health conditions, and profession. A resident may one day be bothered by the sound, and on another occasion, "come down" to meet friends and participate in the samba, or even open the window and listen to the sound from the street while having a beer in their living room (Trotta, 2018, p. 68).

Indeed, according to DeNora (2004), music offers different affordances, which can be appropriated in different ways, positive or negative, by urban actors to shape their agency. This agency symbolizes "feeling, perception, cognition and consciousness, identity, energy, perceived situation, and scene, embodied conductand comportment." (DeNora, 2004, p. 20) and configures the "ability to possess some capacity for social action and its modes of feeling" (DeNora, 2004, p. 153). This sonic agency has political power, driving expressions of individuals, bodies, and collectives against systems of domination and towards the publicity of space (LaBelle, 2018). Through the configuration of an agency, musical practices can carry all their symbolic and identity dimensions into the physical space, engendering

<sup>2</sup> Anthropophonic according to the taxonomy proposed by Gage (2004, *apud* Kang; Schulte-Fortkamp, 2016), referring to sounds induced by human activities.



territorialities that configure territories throughout the city beyond the acoustic environment. In this sense, it is proposed to understand territoriality as:

An immaterial dimension, in the ontological sense that, as an "image" or symbol of a territory, it exists and can effectively insert itself as a political-cultural strategy, even if the territory to which it refers is not concretely manifested (Haesbaert, 2007, p. 25).

Therefore, territoriality does not necessarily express itself physically in space, establishing relationships that precede and surpass its occupation or appropriation, approaching the agency provided by a given affordance of music.

# Musical Territory: conceptual suggestions

Territorialization through musical practices can have different interpretations. One of them refers to the appropriation of the acoustic space as conceptualized by Schafer (1994), which refers to the volume of space in which the sonic expression of the practice would be audible, indicating a physical dimension of the Territory. However, restricting the acoustic Territory solely to the audibility of the musical practice has its conceptual limitations. Besides the peculiarities in sound propagation due to urban morphology and the ephemeral nature of sound, there are variations in the auditory capacity of different individuals that would influence the auditory delimitation of territories. Hugill (2022) shows different physiological, psychological, and technological factors that influence listening, criticizing what would be "normal hearing," as foreseen by ISO 226:2003 (International Organization for Standardization, 2003). Another approach would be closer to LaBelle's (2010) proposal, which considers sound's flexible and temporal nature to indicate a political process of fragmentation and reconfiguration of the acoustic space that is both multiple and specific, carried out participative and relationally dependent on factors beyond sound. In the last decade, the relationship between music and Territory has been discussed by researchers in the field of Communication (Fernandes; Herschmann, 2020, 2018; Herschmann, 2018; Herschmann; Fernandes, 2014; Reia; Herschmann; Fernandes, 2018) through the concept of "sonic-musical territoriality" with the proposal to "value the importance of music and the numerous sounds present in the daily life of cities for the reterritorialization processes being carried out by actors in these spaces" (Fernandes; Herschmann, 2018, p. 20).

Among these different senses, it is proposed to revisit the concept of Territory, which originates from Geography, to understand the territorialization process with two points in mind: that these practices depend on actors to materialize themselves, with territorialization depending on the agency of these actors and not on the sound expression per se; and that musical practices inherit the temporal nature of sound, differentiating them from traditional landscape elements. Primarily, the

concept of Territory is linked to the idea of power, which, according to Haesbaert (2007, p. 20-21), "refers both to power in the most explicit sense, of domination, and to power in the most implicit or symbolic sense, of appropriation." Thus, the power over the Territory assumes both the sense of property and possession, in the case of domination, and the appropriation process expressed by daily marks in the lived space through its times, rhythms, and symbols.

When spatialized through its practice, music represents an expression of power that originates from the appropriation of socially constructed space (Lefebvre, 1991), incorporating social and experiential aspects in its production. Subsequently, it overflows into the acoustic space, leading to a continuous territorialization process, as it is never "empty" (due to the inexistence of silence), with each new sound introduced competing with existing sounds, resulting in a continuous power struggle permeated by listening. In the case of music, this introduction is always carried out by musical actors, resulting in dynamic power relations due to its temporality and multipolar ties due to the different forms of music appropriation. In this way, the Territory created by music:

[...] could be nothing more than the product of social actors. It is these actors who produce the territory, starting from the initial reality given, which is space. There is, therefore, a 'process' of the territory, when all kinds of power relations are manifested [...] (Raffestin, 1993, p. 7-8).

The result of this territorialization process by musical actors is what is proposed to be conceptualized as "musical territory." To discuss it, the perspective of Milton Santos (1999) on the direct relationship between the use of space<sup>3</sup> and the genesis of the Territory is valuable, synthesized in his concept of used Territory:

The territory is not only the result of the superimposition of a set of natural systems and a set of systems of things created by man. The territory is the ground plus the population, that is, an identity, the fact and the feeling of belonging to what belongs to us. The territory is the basis of work, residence, material and spiritual exchanges, and life, upon which it influences. When talking about territory, one must, therefore, immediately understand that one is talking about used territory, used by a given population (Santos, 1999, p. 8).

The Miltonian used Territory, which is relevant because it exposes the pertinent dimensions to its formation: identity, belonging, and its condition as a basis for daily life. From this perspective, the conceptual proposal of the "musical territory"

<sup>3</sup> In the case of Milton Santos, geographical space is seen as a totality in movement through history that in a determined instant can be materially perceived.



starts from two fronts, firstly approaching the "cultural territory" described by Vaz and Jacques (2006), who describe it as the irradiation (or propagation of the sociocultural environment) around cultural equipment, such as urban areas strongly marked by the constant and strong presence of cultural practices and as symbolic territories present in the imagination due to cultural products<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, the intended concept aims to encompass not only the permanent character given by the "cultural territory" but also the fluidity and volatility characteristic of the postmodern city, highlighted in La Barre's (2014) already-mentioned proposal of "sonic territories." For this author, the unifunctional characteristic of the place is replaced in postmodernity by a multiplicity of potentialities that, encouraged by new forms of space appropriation enabled by technological mediation, provide flexible, mobile, participatory, and iterative territories. When originating from musical practices, these territories differ from the permanent sense of "cultural territories," being characterized instead by ephemerality and spontaneous appropriation. It is noted that, in the case of "cultural territories," there is a process of collective territory construction, strengthening a sense of place identity. Still, in the case of "sound territories," there is a possibility of individual construction, the expression of each actor's identity in space through music as an element of cultural representation, which, in its impermanence, delimits a temporal boundary to this form of musical Territory. There is also a direct relationship between the production of "musical territories" and the involved bodies (Haesbaert, 2020), which should not be neutralized and represent different segments of society, directly intersected by issues relevant to each of them.

To detail the role of actors in their (re)territorialization, it is proposed to consider territoriality as:

Territoriality is a broader concept than territory, which encompasses it (every territory would correspond to a territoriality, but not every territoriality would necessarily have a territory), territoriality both as a property of effectively constructed territories and as a "condition" (theoretical) for their existence (Haesbaert, 2007, p. 26).

Thus, territoriality presents itself as antecedent to the Territory, combining an immaterial sense of the impulse and desire to territorialize, referring to a territorial identity of the involved actors that would promote symbolic control of the Territory, with a material sense of physical control of the Territory. Territoriality, in its symbolic aspect, is a fundamental premise for constructing musical territories, as it is a direct result of sonic agencies. In particular the mentioned territorial identity is especially significant as it characterizes this agency resulting from the musical actors' own identities, implying specific forms of territorialization of space and sound mediation (Born, 2013).

Vaz and Jacques (2006) use as an example Itapuã Beach in Salvador and the song "Tarde em Itapuã" by Caymmi and Vinícius de Moraes. A Rio de Janeiro example would be Copacabana Beach and the eponymous song by João de Barro and Alberto Ribeiro, which immortalized the beach in the voice of Dick Farney in 1946 as the "Princess of the Sea."



Another critical dimension of territoriality is that the Territory is not only produced but also "consumed":

The territory is also a "consumed" product, or, if we prefer, a product experienced by those same characters who, without having participated in its elaboration, use it as a means [...] Territoriality reflects, with great certainty, the power given to consumption through its "products" (Raffestin, 1993, p. 8).

From this perspective, the power given to the consumption movement of the Territory is especially significant in the case of musical territories since, although the sonic production comes from a specific individual/group, the listening is often shared. In this way, those who "consume" the music reinforce the construction of the Territory, as they validate the musical practice through their territoriality. Another perspective on territoriality is exposed by Saquet (2009):

Territoriality is understood as the enhancement of the conditions and potential resources of territorial contexts in development processes, which can be translated into active territoriality, which can be realized through political organization and participatory planning (Saquet, 2009, p. 87-88).

This perspective suggests that territoriality is linked to the enhancement of certain functions and affordances of music (Lamont; Greasley; Sloboda, 2016; Merriam, 1964; Sloboda, 2010) that influence the actions of the involved actors. These are varied, from aesthetic pleasure to social integration/disintegration, and are associated with specific conditions and activities performed by the involved actors.

Finally, the musical Territory and the territoriality that precedes it, formed from enhancing music's affordances and the power relations established in space, are conceptual proposals for research and projects to avoid exclusively positive or negative considerations about the relationship between music and urban space. The same musical practices can promote "sonic-musical territorialities," which through their regularity produce direct and indirect local benefits to the Territory and "reconfigure the territories in some way and generate new cartographies and sonic or acoustic maps of the city" (Herschmann; Fernandes, 2014, p. 13), as in the case of downtown Rio de Janeiro studied by these authors; or enhance gentrification processes and annoy those who inhabit the place as in the case of the port area of Rio reported by Rocha (2017). In both cases, these conclusions were only possible by directly investigating those who participated in the music-making in the respective spaces.

It is crucial to reflect methodologically to assume this conceptual approach to musical Territory, which involves both the need to understand the actors who territorialize and map, locate, and identify these temporally and spatially dynamic



territories. It, therefore, demands a commitment between sensitive ethnographic practices (Rocha; Eckert, 2008, 2013) and listening to the soundscape (Radicchi, 2017) associated with urban cartography. An example of this approach is carried out by Pereira, Rett, and Bezerra (2021), who highlight the multi-territoriality of musical appropriations on Paulista Avenue (SP) at the Paulista Aberta event through drifts and conversations with those who territorialize the space showing conflicts and consensuses between these actors. These were only evident by assuming the Territory as a central concept, going beyond the qualification of sounds from listening strategies and focusing on the investigation of the (re)production from the actors and their relationship with the sonic, musical, historical, social, identity, and spatial aspects (Bieletto-Bueno, 2020 *apud* Lopes, 2023).

#### Conclusions

Cultural practices, such as musical ones, are integrated daily into the dynamics of urban public open spaces by actors at different levels of power over the space. They can bring a series of positive implications, such as promoting sociability in the space and incorporating areas that have suffered from neglect into the city's sonic-musical geography, thus enhancing their quality. On the other hand, they can be a source of conflict among the different people and identities (and place identities) present in these spaces.

Thus, it is believed that understanding this relationship between music and urban space can be facilitated by the concept of musical Territory and its formation through the territorialities of each actor. This can support understanding the formation or non-formation of conflict in these territories and the conditions and contexts for the symmetry and asymmetry of power relations. Therefore, a new layer is proposed in the discussion about sound, music, and the city, emphasizing the role of actors in constructing everyday space through their territories.

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