Defining the Term

The concept of City as Literacy explores more deeply the relationship between urban spaces and literacy practices. Drawing from literacy and ethnographic studies between the 1960s and 1980s, we propose a concept that begins by reformulating how we see the city. We argue that the city (in its condition of nonhuman) redefines the traditional concepts of reading and writing providing new forms of communication and interpretation of the daily interactions with its surroundings.

In this sense, City as Literacy acknowledges that the city not only hosts but also creates new ways to play with texts. To do so, the city itself provides different ways for conveying messages mediated by languages. It also combines conventional text formats with nontraditional forms of texts, such as billboards, flyers, graffiti, tattoos, clothing, or advertisements, among others. The presence of these multiple forms of texts brings together various linguistic and semiotic resources, thus offering new forms of communication that mix multimodality and indexicality as possibilities for language interplay.

The idea of City as Literacy relies on a number of addition several concepts to operate as a multilinear, multidimensional framework: multimodality, geosemiotics, polylanguaging, translanguaging, metrolingualism, and superdiversity. All these concepts come together to help us explore how different languages coexist as part of the city’s ecosystem.

Connecting it to LSLP

City as Literacy is the leading concept that drives our Community Literacies in Second Language Contexts research line. This line of inquiry has been inquiring and characterizing how languages operate in Medellín and how people are taking part of its dynamics, therefore, this concept becomes foundational for our research.

Being the first concept we developed, it also provided the blueprint for other LSLP concepts such as Language-as-Victory, Polyangulation, or Multimodal Critical Consciousness, to name a few.