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INSTITUTIONAL VISUAL CULTURE AND SYMBOLIC MEMORY IN EDUCATIONAL SPACES: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MEANING-MAKING IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Cultura visual institucional y memoria simbólica en los espacios educativos: percepciones docentes sobre la producción de significados en la gestión educativa contemporánea

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RESUMEN

La cultura visual institucional constituye un componente fundamental en la construcción de significados, identidades y memorias dentro de los espacios educativos contemporáneos. El presente estudio analiza las percepciones docentes acerca de los artefactos visuales, las narrativas gráficas y las geografías simbólicas que intervienen en la comunicación de sentidos institucionales. Desde un enfoque exploratorio de carácter mixto, se combinaron los resultados de una encuesta aplicada a 79 docentes de distintos niveles educativos con el análisis documental de espacios universitarios previamente estudiados en la Universidad de Cienfuegos, empleando una estrategia de triangulación empírica. Los resultados evidencian que las imágenes, los dispositivos iconográficos, las interfaces digitales y los escenarios espaciales son reconocidos como elementos capaces de fortalecer la identidad institucional y la circulación de significados culturales. Asimismo, se identifican tensiones vinculadas a limitaciones estructurales, procesos de innovación pedagógica y apropiaciones simbólicas del espacio educativo. Se concluye que la visualidad no constituye un recurso complementario de la gestión educativa, sino un sistema cultural de representación que organiza experiencias, memorias e identidades colectivas dentro de las instituciones educativas.

Palabras clave: Cultura visual institucional; Memoria institucional; Geografías simbólicas; Pedagogía de la mirada; Semiótica del espacio educativo; Gestión educativa.

ABSTRACT

Institutional visual culture is a fundamental component in the construction of meanings, identities, and collective memories within contemporary educational settings. This study analyzes teachers' perceptions of visual artifacts, graphic narratives, and symbolic geographies involved in communicating institutional meanings. Using an exploratory mixed-methods approach, the study combines the results of a survey administered to 79 teachers from different educational levels with a documentary analysis of university spaces previously studied at the University of Cienfuegos, employing an empirical triangulation strategy. The findings show that images, iconographic devices, digital interfaces, and spatial settings are recognized as elements capable of strengthening institutional identity and the circulation of cultural meanings. Tensions are also identified in relation to structural limitations, pedagogical innovation processes, and the symbolic appropriation of educational space. The study concludes that visuality is not merely a supplementary resource for educational management, but rather a cultural system of representation that organizes experiences, memories, and collective identities within educational institutions.

Keywords: Institutional visual culture; Institutional memory; Symbolic geographies; Pedagogy of the gaze; Educational space semiotics; Educational management.

1. Introduction

The educational institution is a space for the production and circulation of meanings in which images, symbols, visual artifacts, technological devices, and architectural settings actively participate in the construction of collective identities. From this perspective, visual culture transcends the status of an auxiliary resource to become a system of representation through which educational communities organize their memories, project their values, and shape forms of social interaction. As Mirzoeff (2003) points out, visual culture makes it possible to understand how societies produce meaning through images and practices of visualization that influence everyday life.

The so-called pedagogy of the gaze invites us to recognize that education takes place not only through verbal discourse or curricular content, but also through the visual treatments that shape the educational experience. For Hernández (2007), visual culture is a fundamental domain of learning, since subjects interpret and construct knowledge from the images, representations, and visual narratives present in their environment. Photographs, murals, institutional symbols, digital interfaces, and meeting spaces form part of a visual grammar that guides perception and participates in the production of cultural meanings.

In turn, institutional memory finds in visuality one of its main symbolic supports. University spaces, commemorative squares, photographic galleries, and monuments act as devices of representation through which communities preserve shared narratives and strengthen their sense of belonging. This perspective is in dialogue with the notion of sites of memory proposed by Nora (1984), for whom certain spaces condense historical and cultural meanings that contribute to the construction of collective identities.

Similarly, the semiotics of educational space makes it possible to understand that schools and universities are not mere physical containers for academic activities, but symbolic geographies in which discourses, meanings, and forms of representation circulate. In the view of Lefebvre (2013), space is a social production laden with meaning, open to interpretation on the basis of the cultural relations that unfold within it. Murals, squares, corridors, meeting places, and iconographic resources make up sign systems that play a part in the construction of institutional experience.

In the contemporary context, these relations take on new forms through the incorporation of digital interfaces, graphic narratives, and visual artifacts that mediate institutional communication processes. However, although many studies have addressed educational management, there are still few that explore how teachers and educational communities perceive institutional visual culture as a mechanism for producing meaning and constructing identity.

Consequently, this study aims to analyze teachers' perceptions of the institutional visual culture present in educational spaces, and of the graphic narratives and visual artifacts involved in the construction of institutional meanings, identities, and memories in contemporary educational management. To this end, it draws on an

empirical triangulation strategy that combines the results of a survey administered to teachers with the documentary analysis of visual cases from the University of Cienfuegos, understood as expressions of institutional visual memory.

2. Theoretical framework

Addressing institutional visual culture requires an integrative approach capable of linking different dimensions of educational experience. This research assumes that the meanings circulating in educational institutions are not produced in isolation, but through the interaction of images, objects, spaces, memories, and cultural practices. From this perspective, visual culture constitutes the general framework for understanding the production of institutional representations; educational memory provides the mechanisms through which those representations are preserved and transmitted; symbolic geographies explain how spaces are appropriated and endowed with meaning; and spatial semiotics makes it possible to interpret the sign systems present in educational settings. Far from being independent dimensions, these components form a network of relations that contributes to the construction of collective identities and to the circulation of meanings within institutional life.

This theoretical articulation is especially relevant to the analysis of the university spaces and visual artifacts considered in this study, since it makes it possible to examine how visual culture materializes in practices of memory, forms of representation, and processes of symbolic appropriation developed by educational communities.

2.1. Institutional visual culture: images, artifacts, and the production of meaning

The contemporary understanding of visual culture goes beyond treating images as mere decorative resources or teaching aids. From this perspective, images, objects, and visual devices constitute systems of representation through which communities interpret and organize social reality. For Mirzoeff (2003), visual culture studies precisely the practices through which subjects produce and negotiate meanings by way of shared visual experiences.

In the field of education, this conception makes it possible to understand that schools and universities actively participate in the production of visual cultures of their own. Institutional photographs, symbols, murals, digital interfaces, monuments, squares, and iconographic resources make up visual repertoires through which institutions project identities and communicate collective meanings.

In the Latin American context, the contributions of Cabrera Salort (2017) help to understand visuality from decolonial perspectives that recognize the diversity of forms of representation and symbolic production present in cultural processes. This view makes it possible to interpret visual artifacts and spatial practices as manifestations that actively participate in the construction of meaning within educational institutions.

Likewise, Hernández (2007) proposes understanding visual culture as a field of knowledge that makes it possible to analyze the many ways in which images intervene in the construction of subjectivities, values, and social practices. From this standpoint, educational spaces become privileged settings for observing the relationship between visuality, identity, and institutional culture.

2.2. Institutional memory and sites of educational memory

Institutional memory is a cultural construction through which educational communities preserve, reinterpret, and transmit shared experiences, values, and narratives. Far from being a static accumulation of recollections, memory operates as a dynamic process of meaning production that contributes to the shaping of collective identities and to the symbolic continuity of educational institutions.

From this perspective, the spaces, objects, images, and visual devices present in schools and universities take on a fundamental role in the organization of collective memory. Pierre Nora (1984) uses the term sites of memory for those settings in which historical experiences and shared representations crystallize and are able to condense identity-related meanings for a community. Monuments, squares, photographic galleries, murals, and commemorative spaces can therefore be interpreted as material supports in which memory finds visible forms of representation.

In the field of education, Escolano Benito (2010) recognizes that the material culture of the school is an essential component of pedagogical heritage, as it preserves traces of practices, knowledge, and experiences that form part of the history of institutions. From this standpoint, objects, spaces, and images are not secondary elements of school experience, but cultural testimonies that make it possible to understand the processes of symbolic transmission developed by educational communities.

This perspective is developed further in the later work of Escolano Benito (2020), who conceives of school material culture as a privileged source for interpreting the intellectual history of education. According to the author, artifacts, visual documents, buildings, and institutional spaces actively participate in the construction of meaning, shaping narratives capable of linking memory, identity, and educational heritage. In this way, institutional materiality is no longer understood exclusively as a physical support, but becomes a system of cultural representation.

Along the same lines, institutional visual culture can be understood as a space in which memory and representation continually converge. Historical photographs, university monuments, commemorative sculptures, intra-university public spaces, and other iconographic artifacts contribute to the circulation of shared meanings and to the construction of a sense of belonging. Such elements not only evoke events or figures of importance to the community, but also actively participate in shaping collective imaginaries about the institution and its history.

This interpretation is particularly relevant to the analysis of the spaces documented by Bestard González (2019) at the University of Cienfuegos. University squares, sculptures, corridors, and public spaces can be understood as sites of educational

memory in which processes of visual representation, symbolic appropriation, and identity construction converge. More than mere physical settings, these spaces constitute cultural devices capable of preserving institutional narratives and fostering the continuity of the university's collective memory.

From this perspective, institutional memory is no longer conceived solely as an archive of past events, but is understood as a social practice that is constantly updated through images, spaces, and cultural objects. Visuality thus becomes one of the main mechanisms of mediation between past and present, enabling the production and circulation of meanings that strengthen the identity of educational communities.

2.3. Educational space and symbolic geography

The contemporary understanding of educational space has moved beyond conceptions that reduced it to an infrastructure intended exclusively for academic activities. In recent decades, various studies have shown that school and university spaces actively participate in the construction of cultural meanings, relations of belonging, and forms of social representation. From this perspective, space is no longer understood as a mere physical support, but becomes a fundamental dimension of educational experience.

As Ruiz Ruiz (1994) points out, school space is a pedagogical variable of the first order, capable of influencing the dynamics of interaction, institutional organization, and the processes of cultural construction that take place within the educational community. Along similar lines, Maldonado (2021) considers that new pedagogical approaches require educational spaces to be rethought as settings for participation, communication, and innovation, in which learning experiences are linked to diverse forms of symbolic appropriation.

This conception is supported by the contributions of Lefebvre (2013), for whom space is neither a neutral nor a pre-existing reality, but a social production shaped through practices, representations, and power relations. From this perspective, educational spaces can be interpreted as cultural constructions in which institutional projects, collective imaginaries, and processes of social identification materialize.

In the field of cultural geographies, Zusman (2011) stresses the need to understand territories as symbolic constructions traversed by shared memories, representations, and experiences. This view is particularly relevant to the analysis of educational spaces, since it allows us to recognize that squares, corridors, murals, monuments, and meeting places are spatial configurations laden with meanings that exceed their material functionality.

The notion of symbolic geography takes on special relevance when examining the processes through which educational communities attribute meaning to particular places. In this context, spaces are not only inhabited, but also interpreted, remembered, and resignified. As Treviño Aldape (2018) argues, public spaces can be understood as a syntax of place, that is, as sign systems in which objects, routes, symbols, and spatial arrangements communicate messages and construct cultural narratives.

Various studies carried out in contemporary university contexts have highlighted this symbolic dimension of space. Research such as that of Pavan et al. (2008), Rothe and Olascoaga (2010), Vélez-Álvarez et al. (2022), and Gálvez-Nieto, León-Gutiérrez, and Valdivia-Sisniegas (2023) agrees that university spaces foster processes of interaction, identity construction, and cultural appropriation that go beyond strictly academic functions. Consequently, squares, public spaces, common areas, and settings for coexistence can be interpreted as cultural devices in which meanings are negotiated and a sense of institutional belonging is strengthened.

From this perspective, the present study assumes that educational spaces constitute genuine symbolic geographies in which institutional memory, visual culture, and processes of representation converge. On this approach, university squares, commemorative monuments, murals, and the various visual artifacts present in institutional life are interpreted as components of a semiotic fabric that contributes to the construction and circulation of collective meanings. This conception offers a particularly suitable framework for interpreting the cases documented at the University of Cienfuegos, where certain spaces have become visual and memorial landmarks of university identity.

2.4. Semiotics of university spaces

Interpreting educational spaces from a semiotic perspective involves recognizing that they function as systems of communication in which objects, images, routes, monuments, and architectural configurations participate in the production of cultural meanings. From this standpoint, university spaces are no longer conceived exclusively as physical settings, but become symbolic structures capable of communicating institutional values, memories, and identities.

This conception finds one of its foundations in the work of Lefebvre (2013), who understands space as a social production in which practices, representations, and everyday experiences come together in the construction of meaning. Consequently, educational spaces can be analyzed as cultural configurations that express specific forms of institutional organization, shared visions of knowledge, and modes of symbolic representation of university life.

In a complementary way, Treviño Aldape (2018) proposes understanding public space from a semiotic perspective through the notion of the "syntax of place." According to this author, the arrangement of objects, routes, architectural elements, and visual landmarks generates sign systems that make the communication of collective meanings possible. This approach is especially useful for examining educational spaces in which material forms are closely linked to processes of identity construction.

Various studies carried out in university contexts reinforce this interpretation. Pavan et al. (2008) note that university spaces actively participate in processes of interaction and social learning, while Vélez-Álvarez, Pico-Merchán, Escobar-Potes, and Jaramillo-Ángel (2022) emphasize that students attribute specific meanings to particular institutional settings on the basis of experiences of coexistence, belonging, and

symbolic appropriation. Along similar lines, Gálvez-Nieto, León-Gutiérrez, and Valdivia-Sisniegas (2023) observe that contemporary university public spaces are privileged environments for building social and cultural ties within the academic community.

On these premises, the spaces documented at the University of Cienfuegos can be interpreted as semiotic devices of institutional memory. Elements such as squares, sculptures, meeting areas, and intra-university public spaces not only organize movement or academic activities, but also participate in the circulation of meanings that link the university community to its history and identity. The sculpture dedicated to Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, for example, transcends its material condition to become a visual landmark that brings together practices of commemoration, symbolic appropriation, and institutional representation.

From this perspective, the images and visual documents analyzed in this study are more than mere photographic records. They function as evidence of cultural processes through which the university community constructs and updates narratives about itself. Observing these spaces makes it possible to understand how institutional memory is materially inscribed in the educational environment and how certain places acquire the capacity to act as cultural signs recognizable to those who take part in university life.

Consequently, the semiotics of university spaces offers a particularly relevant framework for interpreting the relations between visual culture, educational memory, and identity construction. Rather than neutral settings, spaces appear as systems of representation in which images, symbols, and social practices converge and contribute to the production and circulation of meanings within educational institutions.

3. Methodology

- Research design

The research followed an exploratory mixed-methods approach aimed at analyzing the institutional visual culture present in educational spaces. The study adopted a multiple-case design that combined the exploration of teachers' perceptions of meaning-making in educational contexts with the documentary analysis of institutional visual referents. This approach made it possible to examine both the participants' discourses and the material and symbolic expressions of visual culture present in university settings.

- Participants and sample

The sample consisted of 79 teachers from different educational levels, selected through purposive or convenience sampling. Of the total number of participants, 42% worked in primary education, 31% in secondary education, and 26% in higher education. Selection was based on criteria of accessibility and availability, with the aim of

bringing together diverse professional experiences related to educational processes and the construction of institutional meanings.

- **Empirical triangulation strategy**

The research incorporated an empirical triangulation strategy by integrating two complementary sources of information: on the one hand, the perceptions obtained through the survey administered to teachers; on the other, the documentary and semiotic analysis of university spaces previously studied at the University of Cienfuegos (Bestard González, 2019). The incorporation of both sources made it possible to contrast discourses, representations, and visual manifestations of institutional culture, enriching the interpretation of the results.

- **Instrument**

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire designed specifically to explore teachers' perceptions of the presence of global trends in educational settings and their relationship with the processes of production, circulation, and interpretation of visual meanings. The instrument was administered through Google Forms and included closed- and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions made it possible to identify assessments concerning institutional visuality, graphic narratives, digital interfaces, emotional well-being, sustainability, and artificial intelligence as components of contemporary educational culture. The open-ended questions, in turn, helped to identify teachers' representations related to visual artifacts, school spaces, and the forms of symbolic construction of institutional identity.

- **Procedure**

The survey was distributed through academic networks and professional contacts linked to different educational levels. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality of the information provided by the participants was guaranteed. The data collection process yielded a total of 79 valid responses. In parallel, visual documents and institutional images from previous studies conducted at the University of Cienfuegos (Bestard González, 2019) were selected and analyzed in order to incorporate a spatial and symbolic dimension into the analysis of institutional visual culture.

- **Analysis procedure**

The information was analyzed through a complementary strategy of quantitative and qualitative treatment. The closed-ended responses were processed using basic descriptive procedures based on the reports generated by Google Forms and Google Sheets, yielding frequencies and percentages that made it possible to identify general trends in teachers' perceptions.

The open-ended responses were examined through thematic content analysis with open coding. This procedure made it possible to identify emerging categories related to the obstacles, innovative experiences, and forms of visual representation present in

educational contexts. These categories were subsequently grouped into interpretive axes associated with visual culture, graphic narratives, symbolic geographies, and the construction of institutional meanings.

Finally, the results obtained were contrasted with the semiotic-documentary analysis of the selected institutional visual referents, thereby developing an empirical triangulation strategy that favored the integrated interpretation of teachers' discourses and of the visual manifestations present in educational culture.

- **Empirical triangulation strategy**

In order to broaden the understanding of institutional visual culture, the research incorporated an empirical triangulation strategy based on the integration of two complementary sources of information. The first consisted of the teachers' perceptions obtained through the survey administered to the participants, aimed at identifying forms of visual representation, the circulation of meanings, and the presence of global trends in educational contexts. The second corresponded to the documentary and semiotic analysis of a set of institutional visual referents previously studied at the University of Cienfuegos (Bestard González, 2019), selected for their value as expressions of visual memory and institutional identity.

Combining both sources made it possible to contrast discourses, representations, and visual manifestations of educational culture, contributing to a broader understanding of the processes of symbolic construction present in school and university spaces. From this perspective, the iconographic cases analyzed were treated as settings of representation in which cultural meanings associated with identity, collective memory, and institutional communication circulate.

This strategy fostered dialogue between the survey data and the visual artifacts studied, making it possible to interpret visuality not only as a resource for educational mediation, but also as a cultural dimension that structures forms of representation, meaning production, and the construction of institutional belonging.

4. Results

4.1. General characterization of the participants

The survey was answered by 79 teachers from different educational levels. Of the total number of participants, 42% worked in primary education, 31% in secondary education, and 26% in higher education. With regard to professional experience, 30% reported between 0 and 5 years of teaching, 29% between 6 and 10 years, another 29% between 11 and 20 years, while 12% had more than 20 years of experience.

This diversity made it possible to bring together perspectives from different educational contexts and professional trajectories, providing a broad view of the ways in which visual culture, graphic narratives, and institutional representations are perceived in contemporary educational spaces.

4.2. Teachers' perceptions of visual culture and contemporary trends

The results made it possible to identify various perceptions among teachers regarding the presence of contemporary trends in educational contexts. The responses reflect a growing appreciation of visual resources, digital interfaces, and institutional spaces as relevant components in the production and circulation of meanings within educational communities. The participants also recognized the influence of processes associated with digitalization, emotional well-being, sustainability, and visual narratives on contemporary school life.

From the teachers' perspective, visuality is not limited to the use of isolated graphic resources, but participates in shaping forms of communication, representation, and the construction of institutional identity. In this regard, the participants pointed to the importance of visual artifacts, graphic narratives, and digitalized environments as mediators in the educational and cultural processes that take place in schools.

4.3. Perceived obstacles to the incorporation of contemporary trends

The teachers identified various factors that hinder the incorporation of educational transformations associated with contemporary trends. The most frequently mentioned obstacles include insufficient technological resources, limitations in professional training, institutional resistance to change, and work overload. These barriers affect both the integration of digital technologies and the development of new forms of visual representation and institutional communication.

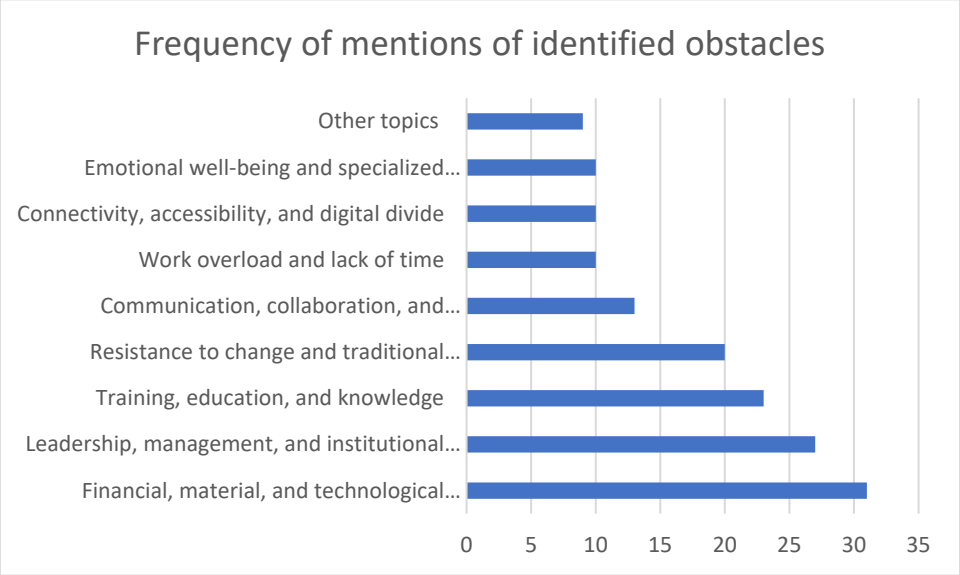


Figure 1.

Frequency of mentions of the main perceived obstacles to the incorporation of contemporary trends in educational contexts.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The distribution observed shows that material resources and institutional and training barriers continue to condition the implementation of innovative initiatives.

Nevertheless, the participants also recognized that these obstacles do not eliminate the possibility of building educational experiences capable of producing and communicating relevant meanings within school communities.

4.4. Innovative experiences and narratives of educational transformation

Alongside the difficulties noted, the teachers reported various innovative experiences developed in their professional contexts. These initiatives were concentrated mainly on the use of digital interfaces, environmental projects, actions associated with emotional well-being, inclusive practices, and active learning methodologies.



Figure 2.

Distribution of innovative experiences identified by teachers.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The experiences described show a significant presence of visual artifacts and digital interfaces as mediators of educational processes. References also emerged to collaborative projects, actions linked to institutional culture, and strategies that use graphic narratives to strengthen student participation and the circulation of shared meanings within educational communities.

The testimonies collected made it possible to identify initiatives related to interactive screens, digital platforms, visual resources for institutional communication, environmental projects, and activities aimed at strengthening student well-being. These experiences suggest that educational innovation is expressed not only through the incorporation of technologies, but also through new forms of representation, communication, and symbolic construction of school life.

4.5. Emerging patterns in teachers' perceptions

The joint analysis of the responses made it possible to identify common patterns associated with institutional visual culture. The participants repeatedly recognized the importance of images, digital environments, educational spaces, and graphic resources in shaping learning experiences and transmitting institutional values.

The responses also revealed a tendency to conceive of educational spaces as settings of representation in which shared cultural meanings circulate. This perception appears linked to the recognition of visuality as a relevant component in the construction of identity, belonging, and communication within educational institutions.

Taken together, the findings show that contemporary educational transformations are perceived by teachers not only as technological or methodological processes, but also as phenomena linked to the production of meaning, to forms of institutional representation, and to the manifestations of visual culture present in school life.

The findings make it possible to recognize that teachers perceive visual artifacts, graphic narratives, digital interfaces, and institutional spaces as relevant components of contemporary educational life. The responses also show that the circulation of visual meanings is not limited to specific technological resources, but is also manifested in everyday practices, settings of representation, and forms of symbolic construction of institutional identity.

Consequently, the results go beyond a reading centered exclusively on the adoption of educational trends and open up the possibility of interpreting visuality as a cultural dimension present in the processes of communication, representation, and meaning production that characterize contemporary educational management. This perspective is the starting point for the discussion that follows.

5. Discussion

Interpreting the results makes it possible to understand teachers' perceptions from a broader perspective associated with contemporary visual culture. Beyond identifying the use of graphic resources or digital devices, the findings show the presence of forms of representation that actively participate in the construction of meaning within educational institutions. In this sense, visuality emerges as a constitutive component of school life, present both in communicative practices and in the spaces, symbols, and narratives that shape institutional identity.

This interpretation is consistent with the arguments of Mitchell (2005), who recognizes that images and visual languages form part of the cultural processes through which societies construct meaning. Similarly, Quinga Suárez and Caizaluisa Barros (2025) point to the need to understand contemporary educational transformation as a phenomenon that integrates cultural, communicational, and technological dimensions.

The results show that the trends identified by teachers cannot be understood solely as methodological or technological innovations. The presence of graphic narratives, digital interfaces, visual artifacts, and settings of representation suggests the existence of deeper processes linked to the production, circulation, and appropriation of cultural meanings in educational settings. From this perspective, visual culture constitutes a relevant framework for interpreting the transformations observed in contemporary educational management.

5.1. Visuality, memory, and institutional identity

On the basis of the results obtained, visuality can be interpreted as an essential component of the processes of symbolic construction present in educational institutions. The participating teachers recognized the relevance of images, spaces, symbols, and digital interfaces in producing meaningful educational experiences, showing that visual culture forms part of the way in which school communities construct identity and a sense of belonging.

This interpretation finds a counterpart in experiences documented at the University of Cienfuegos. In the chapter «Los espacios públicos intrauniversitarios en la vida universitaria» (Intra-university public spaces in university life), included in the book Sueños y realidades: Evocaciones universitarias en Cienfuegos 1979 - 2019 (Bestard González, 2019), the physical and symbolic spaces of the university are described as settings of collective memory and cultural representation. Through squares, murals, common areas, and meeting spaces, the institution has built over several decades a symbolic geography in which values, traditions, and forms of shared identity materialize.



Figure 3.

University space as a setting of institutional representation.

Source: Bestard González (2019).



Figure 4.

Visual referents of institutional memory and identity.

Source: Bestard González (2019).

The presence of these spaces makes it possible to understand that institutional visuality is not limited to graphic or technological elements. It is also manifested through spatial configurations that organize the everyday experience of the educational community. University spaces thus function as settings in which processes of representation, appropriation, and symbolic circulation take place.

A significant example is the Carlos Rafael Rodríguez Square, whose presence transcends its physical dimension to become a landmark of institutional memory. The different ways in which this space is used and appropriated show how certain visual elements acquire symbolic value through the social practices of the university community.



Figure 5.

Carlos Rafael Rodríguez Square as a landmark of institutional visual memory.

Source: Bestard González (2019).



Figure 6.

Symbolic appropriation of institutional space by the university community.

Source: Bestard González (2019).

The evidence provided by the teachers and the experiences documented at the University of Cienfuegos make it possible to interpret visuality as a mediating dimension between institutional culture and educational communication. The spaces,

symbols, images, and commemorative practices observed not only represent shared values, but also facilitate their circulation within the academic community. From this perspective, visuality ceases to be a complementary resource and becomes an articulating element that makes cultural meanings visible and fosters the construction of communication processes with institutional significance.

5.2. Integrative model of educational dimensions

The results obtained, together with the interpretation developed in the preceding section, make it possible to move toward a broader understanding of visuality within contemporary educational processes. The teachers' perceptions gathered in the survey show that visual resources, institutional spaces, graphic narratives, and digital interfaces occupy an increasingly important place in school life. However, the findings suggest that their importance lies not only in an instrumental or technological function, but in their capacity to produce, organize, and communicate shared meanings within educational communities.

From this perspective, visual culture makes it possible to understand educational management as a process that links material and symbolic elements. Institutional spaces, images, symbols, graphic narratives, and digital environments act simultaneously as forms of representation and as mechanisms of cultural circulation. Consequently, visuality can be understood as a dimension that connects processes of identity construction with the communicational practices present in educational institutions.

On the basis of this interpretation, an integrative model of educational dimensions is proposed that synthesizes the relations identified between culture, communication, and visuality. The model is not intended to replace other theoretical approaches to educational management, but to offer an articulating reading capable of explaining the production of meaning observed in the school and university contexts analyzed.

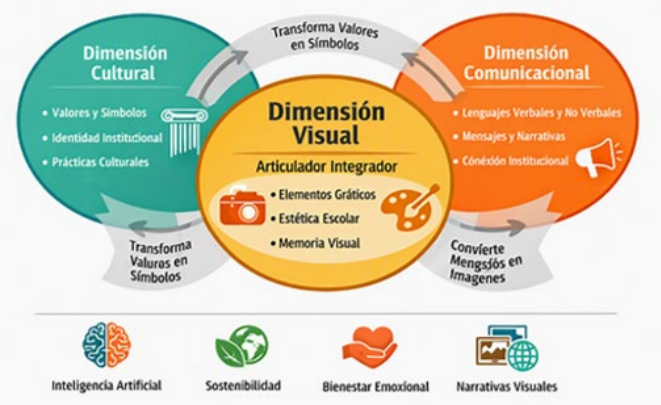


Figure 7.

Integrative model of educational dimensions.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

As represented in Figure 7, the cultural dimension is the space in which institutional values, memories, symbols, and identities take shape. The communicational dimension fosters the circulation, exchange, and appropriation of these meanings within the educational community. Between the two, visuality emerges as an articulating dimension that makes cultural content visible and enables its communication through images, spaces, objects, graphic narratives, and digital interfaces.

The proposal makes it possible to interpret visual artifacts and settings of representation as active components of educational culture. In this sense, university squares, monuments, murals, digital platforms, posters, graphic resources, and other visual elements are no longer regarded as mere material supports, but are understood as devices of meaning that play a part in the construction of identity, memory, and a sense of institutional belonging.

The incorporation of the contemporary trends identified by teachers can also be understood according to this logic. Digitalization, artificial intelligence, emotional well-being, and sustainability find expression in various visual narratives that circulate in educational spaces. In this way, these trends act not only as pedagogical innovations, but as cultural forms that produce new languages of representation and new ways of experiencing institutional life.

Consequently, the proposed model synthesizes the main conceptual contribution of this research by positing that visuality constitutes an articulating dimension between institutional culture and the communicational processes of contemporary educational management. This interpretation makes it possible to understand education not only as a space for the transmission of knowledge, but also as a setting of symbolic production in which images, spaces, and representations actively participate in the construction of shared meanings.

5.3. Proposed guidelines for visual culture in contemporary educational management

The interpretation developed from the results makes it possible to move toward the formulation of guidelines intended to strengthen the understanding and management of visual culture in educational contexts. These guidelines arise from the articulation between teachers' perceptions, the analysis of institutional visual referents, and the proposed integrative model. Their purpose is not to establish closed prescriptions, but to offer criteria that favor the conscious construction of spaces, narratives, and representations capable of strengthening institutional identity and the circulation of shared meanings within educational communities.

- **Guideline 1. Recognizing educational spaces as symbolic geographies**

Guiding principle

To recognize educational spaces as settings of cultural representation and construction of institutional identity.

Rationale

The results show that teachers attribute value to physical spaces as bearers of memory, meaning, and belonging. The discussion showed that certain educational settings function as supports of institutional visual culture and contribute to the construction of collective identities. From this perspective, educational spaces do not merely fulfill practical functions, but also participate in the expression and preservation of institutional memory.

Practical orientation

To incorporate cultural and symbolic criteria into the design, conservation, and use of school and university spaces. To this end, it is proposed that the value of corridors, squares, murals, common areas, and meeting spaces be considered as settings that make it possible to express the history, values, and shared experiences of the educational community.

Expected impact

Strengthening of institutional memory, collective identity, and the sense of belonging of the members of the educational community.

- **Guideline 2. Development of institutional visual narratives**

Guiding principle

To foster the circulation of shared meanings through the development of visual narratives linked to institutional identity, values, and projects.

Rationale

Visual narratives are relevant mechanisms for communicating and making visible the meanings present in institutional life. The source text notes that graphic resources, exhibitions, posters, audiovisual productions, and digital platforms make it possible to represent the values, traditions, and projects of educational communities. These forms of representation contribute to institutional communication and to the construction of shared referents.

Practical orientation

To incorporate visual narratives into institutional communication strategies through graphic resources, exhibitions, posters, audiovisual productions, and digital platforms. It is proposed that the visual presentation of educational values, traditions, activities, and projects be encouraged, ensuring that the content represented remains consistent with institutional identity.

Expected impact

Greater visibility of institutional values, traditions, and projects, as well as the strengthening of communication and shared meanings within the educational community.

- **Guideline 3. Fostering the production of institutional visual narratives**

Guiding principle

To promote the collective construction of visual narratives that represent the diversity of experiences and meanings present in the educational community.

Rationale

The source text proposes that visual narratives can be constructed through participatory processes that incorporate the experiences of those who make up the educational community. This perspective makes it possible to understand visual production as a cultural practice that is not limited to transmitting institutional messages, but also makes it possible to represent different experiences, strengthen collective identity, and foster the circulation of shared meanings.

Practical orientation

To promote participatory processes of visual production through the creation of posters, exhibitions, audiovisual productions, and other graphic resources linked to institutional experiences, projects, and traditions. It is proposed that the participation of members of the educational community in the construction of these representations be encouraged, taking into account the diversity of experiences and meanings that coexist in the institution.

Expected impact

Strengthening of participation in the construction of institutional visual identity, greater representation of the diversity of experiences of the educational community, and expanded opportunities for sharing collective meanings.

- **Guideline 4. Integration of visual artifacts as cultural mediators**

Guiding principle

To recognize and integrate visual and iconographic artifacts as cultural mediators that help to organize experiences, communicate meanings, and strengthen identity processes.

Rationale

The results and the interpretation developed in the study make it possible to recognize the importance of visual and iconographic artifacts in contemporary educational processes. Their function is not limited to serving as didactic or technological resources, since they also participate in the expression of values, the construction of

meaning, and the shaping of institutional identity. This perspective broadens the understanding of visuality by considering its cultural and communicational dimension within educational life.

Practical orientation

To encourage the conscious incorporation of visual artifacts into pedagogical practices and institutional spaces, considering both their didactic function and the cultural meanings they communicate. It is proposed that attention be paid to the selection, arrangement, and use of images, symbols, graphic resources, and iconographic elements, relating them to educational objectives and to the values the institution wishes to represent.

Expected impact

Expansion of the pedagogical and cultural function of visual artifacts, strengthening of the communication of institutional meanings, and greater articulation between visual resources, educational experiences, and identity construction.

- **Guideline 5. Promotion of the critical reading of images and representations**

Guiding principle

To foster the development of a reflective visual culture through the critical interpretation of images, symbols, interfaces, and visual discourses.

Rationale

The expansion of digital environments and contemporary visual narratives raises the need to understand the processes of signification present in images and representations. The source text emphasizes that these processes are manifested both in digital media and platforms and in institutional spaces. From this perspective, the critical reading of visual culture makes it possible to examine how values, identities, and meanings are represented and communicated in educational contexts.

Practical orientation

To incorporate spaces for reflection on the images, symbols, interfaces, and visual narratives present in educational practices and digital environments. It is proposed that their analysis be encouraged with attention to the meanings they communicate, the values they represent, and their relationship with institutional identity and the experiences of the educational community.

Expected impact

Strengthening of the capacity for critical interpretation of images and representations, greater awareness of the meanings that circulate in educational settings, and development of a reflective relationship with contemporary visual culture.

- **Guideline 6. Strengthening visuality as an articulating dimension of educational management**

Guiding principle

To integrate visuality as an articulating dimension between institutional culture, communicational processes, and the construction of shared meanings.

Rationale

The results and the proposed integrative model make it possible to interpret visuality as a dimension that relates institutional culture to processes of educational communication. Symbolic spaces, visual artifacts, images, and graphic narratives participate in the expression of values and in the construction of collective identities and memories. From this perspective, visual culture is a component of educational experience that can contribute to an integrated understanding of practices of institutional representation and communication.

Practical orientation

To incorporate reflection on visual representations, symbolic spaces, and graphic narratives into educational management strategies. It is proposed that the design and use of spaces, the production of institutional narratives, the integration of visual artifacts, and the critical reading of representations be considered in an articulated manner, with attention to their relationship with the identity, memory, and communication of the educational community.

Expected impact

Greater articulation between institutional culture, communication, and visuality; strengthening of identity and shared meanings; and consolidation of an understanding of educational management that recognizes the role of images, symbols, spaces, and narratives in the construction of institutional experience.

Closing remarks on the proposal

Taken together, these six guidelines make it possible to transfer the findings of the study to the sphere of institutional action. Their articulation proposes an understanding of visual culture that integrates symbolic spaces, institutional narratives, visual artifacts, the critical reading of representations, and visuality as an articulating dimension of educational management. More than a set of isolated operational recommendations, they constitute guidelines for understanding how images, symbols, and settings of representation participate in shaping identities, memories, and forms of institutional communication. From this perspective, visual culture is recognized as a relevant component of contemporary educational experience and as a dimension that can be consciously incorporated into the management of educational institutions.

6. Conclusions

The study makes it possible to recognize institutional visual culture as a relevant dimension of contemporary educational management, insofar as it participates in the construction of shared meanings, collective identities, and institutional memories. The teachers' perceptions analyzed show that educational spaces, graphic narratives, images, and visual artifacts are not merely functional or decorative elements, but also play a part in the ways in which educational communities represent their history, communicate their values, and build a sense of belonging.

The empirical triangulation between the results of the survey administered to 79 teachers from different educational levels and the documentary analysis of visual cases from the University of Cienfuegos made it possible to approach visuality from two complementary dimensions: teachers' perceptions and the expressions of visual memory present in specific institutional spaces. This approach helped to identify points of convergence between the appreciation of visual resources and their potential to communicate cultural meanings, strengthen institutional identity, and foster the symbolic recognition of educational spaces.

The results also indicate that the incorporation of visual culture into educational management is linked to institutional conditions that can facilitate or limit its development. These include the availability of resources, training needs, resistance to change, and difficulties associated with the organization of work. These conditions show that recognizing the value of visuality needs to be accompanied by organizational and pedagogical decisions that favor its conscious integration into institutional life.

The analysis also highlights the importance of understanding educational spaces as symbolic geographies and visual artifacts as cultural mediators. From this perspective, institutional memory is not preserved exclusively through written documents or formal records, but is also expressed through images, spatial configurations, graphic narratives, and other resources that help to represent shared experiences, values, and trajectories. Recognizing this opens up possibilities for strengthening institutional communication and promoting broader participation by the educational community in the construction of its meanings.

In line with these findings, a set of guidelines is proposed aimed at recognizing the symbolic value of educational spaces, developing and producing institutional visual narratives, integrating visual artifacts as cultural mediators, promoting the critical reading of images and representations, and strengthening visuality as an articulating dimension of educational management. These guidelines offer direction for transferring the results of the study to the institutional sphere, without establishing uniform prescriptions, and allow the cultural, historical, and organizational particularities of each educational context to be taken into account.

Finally, the study helps to position institutional visual culture as a relevant field of reflection for understanding the processes of meaning production in contemporary education. Its exploratory scope invites further research examining, in different educational contexts, the relations between visuality, symbolic memory, institutional

identity, and educational management. It would also be relevant to extend the analysis of the participation experiences of educational communities and of the conditions that favor the sustained incorporation of visual culture into institutional practices.

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