Recovery of Public Spaces: A Comparison of Three Case Studies to Recover Public Spaces in Vulnerable Communities in Santiago, Chile

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Abstract. This document analyzes different strategies developed to recover deteriorated public spaces in three vulnerable communities in Santiago, Chile. Its urban expansion has been characterized by a structural socioeconomic process, which has produced inequalities between income and the composition of the social class in geographical spatial distribution. The socioeconomic inequalities prevailing in Santiago have served to build a fragmented and segregated city where access to public spaces is limited for residents living in vulnerable and low-income neighborhoods. In these districts, children, adolescents and the wider community have been brought indoors, deprived of open spaces and natural environments for group play or a diversity of experiences. Consequently, the intervention strategies explored in this document attempted to rehabilitate and recover abandoned spaces such as small dumps or parking lots in three different communities in Santiago: one in the commune of La Pintana and the second one in the commune of Quinta Normal. The objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of improving public spaces by transforming them into public outdoor play areas for children and into a social place for community use. These three interventions were developed with the support of local government through the use of reused materials. However, neighborhood residents participated in only two of these interventions. The evidence behind the three case studies analyzed confirmed that the involvement of community members and families was critical to ensuring the sustainability of these interventions. As a result, when neighborhood residents were involved from the early stages of space design through construction, they developed a sense of ownership that had an impact on the preservation and maintenance of these types of initiatives, thus ensuring successful intervention.

1. Introduction
This study analyzes the strategies for recovering deteriorating public spaces, from the perspective of appropriation of spaces, segregation, and social capital, implemented in three vulnerable communities in Santiago, located in the Metropolitan Region of Chile. Santiago is a city configured by territories marked by unequal conditions, where opportunities for social mobility, access to services, quality of housing and diversity of public spaces are scarce. Santiago has been conceived as a segregated city that displaces to the periphery those people who belong to the most disadvantaged groups. Sabatini et al. [6] highlight that those who live in social housing in popular and segregated places experience a higher level of exclusion and less social mobility than those who live in homes of the same social
origin living in social housing located in sectors with low segregation, "affecting the opportunities of the most vulnerable children and adolescents" [8].

Social segregation in urban space has increased rapidly since the 80's to date; increasing inequalities of income and real access to urban offers among the population belonging to vulnerable or weaker groups living in the marginalization of ghettos or peripheries, where there are few quality public spaces, so people feel very insecure to leave their homes [5]. In this context, the perception of insecurity and abandonment of public spaces function as a circular and cumulative process, as social interaction spaces are lost where collective identity is constructed, that is, a public meeting space that offers the appropriate conditions for the development of a community with its own identity [3]. From the point of view of design, spatial segregation has given rise to a composition of public spaces that have been converted into deserted sites without trees, dry, converted into micro garbage dumps, car parks or spaces for delinquency and drug consumption, depriving the community of an environment that allows it to connect with others and generate personal or collective identity. In this way, the appropriation of public spaces is closely linked to the tangible and refers to specific activities that users carry out to transform a space according to their socio-cultural needs and norms [7].

This occurs in a short period of time, but generates a high impact on the immediate surroundings of the community [11], as it allows the built place to be endowed with individual and collective meanings, i.e. footprints or marks that each person leaves as a symbolic load that defines their own identity [11]. A feeling of belonging to the space that results after having left an emotional imprint that goes beyond legal belonging [10]. With respect to social capital, which from social psychology is understood as a form of granting common benefits, that regenerate the social fabric, motivate the empowerment of the community, and allow a greater associativity of people and collectives, promoting relations of trust and cooperation [2] specifically considers it as "features of the social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society facilitating coordinated actions".

Internationally, the recovery of public spaces with community participation has been approached from different disciplines, an example of which are the projects of the A77 group in Argentina, which combine architecture, art, sociology and urbanism, who create objects with discarded materials for the development of experimental housing works and devices that detonate social dynamics, such as El Gran Aula as a mobile and dismountable constructive device composed of a series of modules that allow multiple cultural actions in the space in contact with communities, social and educational institutions. In Chile, another example is the Program for the Recovery of Participatory Public Spaces (REPP) of the Municipality of Peñalolén, which has promoted community participation in the redesign of public space, use and maintenance, favoring the expression of creativity and neighborhood identity; and the creation of conditions to expand social control over spaces and increase the perception of security, motivating the appropriation of space and the generation of social capital [4]. Additionally, in 2006 the program "Quiero mi barrio" of the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU) appears, which installs a process of public management of urban policy to produce an integral improvement of the quality of life of citizens in housing, neighborhood and city. The objective is to prioritize material investment and social work in the same way, achieving a city built from the citizen through the logic of listening, talking, and proposing together, strengthening the social fabric and the re-composition of the community.

The examples confirm that the design of public space and its quality can be evaluated from the perspective of the appropriation of spaces, segregation and social capital, in accordance with the intensity and quality of the social relations it provides, for its capacity to generate mixtures of groups and behaviours, as well as for its quality of stimulating symbolic identification, expression and cultural integration [1].
2. Case Studies: Transforming into Practice
This research analyzes three interventions of deteriorating urban spaces carried out by the consulting firm "Taller NO!" (Workshop NO) in 2004, in the Plaza San Alberto, La Pintana; and the cooperative "La Ciudad Posible Chile", in 2018 in the commune of Quinta Normal, here we worked on the improvement of the green point in the Headquarters of the Elderly, Aguirre street and in Punto Limpio, Huérfanos street. These three places were designed taking into consideration the different perspectives, points of view and interests of several relevant actors of the commune. Thus, in the design stage the information was captured through participatory workshops, which allowed generating instances of interaction between the parties involved, putting in tension or revealing the interests of each of the participants, recording the different positions, obtained through observation and brainstorming, interpreting the needs and preferences of the participants involved, through a feedback process where the interpreted information was returned to the participants for re-evaluation, collecting new comments and relevant information, until reaching the plan with the final design that was implemented.

Table 1. Summary Descriptive of Cases

| Case | Commune          | Year | Project Duration | Entities Involved                                           | Executing Entities       | Participant Community |
|------|------------------|------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1    | La Pintana       | 2004 | 7 meses          | - Municipality of La Pintana - Social Organization of housing Debtors - Surrounding Neighbours | Taller NO!                | Adults: 25 Kids: 10   |
| 2    | Quinta Normal    | 2018 | 5 meses          | - Municipality - Club Elder Adult - Neighbours             | La Ciudad Posible, Chile. | Elder Adults: 12 Kids: 5 |
| 3    | Quinta Normal    | 2018 | 5 meses          | - Municipality - Base Recycler - Without resident participation | La Ciudad Posible, Chile. | Adults: 5 Kids: 0      |

2.1. La Pintana, Plaza San Alberto
La Pintana is one of the communes located in the south sector of the city of Santiago de Chile, in the decade of the 80's and 90's a great demographic expansion is generated towards the commune as a result of the eradication of the most disadvantaged sectors of the communes of Las Condes, Providencia, La Reina among other communes. This commune of great extensions occupies the second place of the communes of the metropolitan area with more micro-landfills, as it indicates the study carried out by the Chilean Chamber of the Construction - Chile in the year 2016, generating thus areas of spatial exclusion that impact in the urban environment of the city (Soto, 2016).

This problem in La Pintana, in 2004, gave rise to the project of the public spaces consultant "Taller NO!", which together with the Municipality, a group of housing debtors, neighbors and neighbors, worked to recover and transform a public space declared by the municipality as a green area, but converted as a micro-landfill, therefore, the intervention in case No. 1 consisted of transforming that micro-landfill in a square apt to be, share and play.
2.2. **Description of work done on case 1**

The intervention was developed through a participatory design process over 18 weekends in conjunction with the community, the municipalities, and the executing agency, as indicated in Table 1, which provides a descriptive summary of the cases analyzed.

The design of the plaza was the result of a diagnosis that allowed generating a unique proposal that emerged from the perspective of not standardizing the public space and revealing the identity of the community, thus using materials in disuse for the construction of equipment and green areas. In this way, the present case of intervention can be divided into two phases: (1) phase of participatory workshops for the diagnosis and design of the site and (2) phase of implementation of the public space design proposal with collaborative construction workshops. In the diagnostic workshops, we worked with the particular needs of the neighbors adjacent to the square, where we analyzed the place through planimetrics, in which we placed the negative and positive externalities. The workshops of design of the space allowed to define the ways of circulation and where to locate the elements of equipment and green zones. In addition, a workshop was held where the group of participants was divided into 4 working groups, thus having 4 proposals of the site that were later unified by the consultant, developing a counterproposal that was agreed among the participants, and then in a final workshop to obtain the final proposal.

Once the proposal was approved, fieldwork began, which was carried out in conjunction with municipal staff. First, the site was cleaned and weeded, and then we continued with the construction of the space, such as roads, play areas, the location of trees, gardeners, children's games, garbage cans, chess tables for the elderly and seats for the community in general. The days were held on Saturday mornings, and worked from very early in the morning until ending with a community lunch.

**Figure 1.** Participatory Diagnosis and Design Workshops  
**Figure 2.** Workshops in the field

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Source: Own elaboration
Figure 3. Image of the equipment for the elderly and the paths of San Alberto de La Pintana square.

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 4. Image of the playground of Plaza San Alberto de la Pintana

Source: Own elaboration
2.3. Case 2 and case 3: Quinta Normal

The commune of Quinta Normal is located to the northwest of the city of Santiago, is characterized by houses of continuous façade leaving a platform as antechamber to the houses that in the best of the cases become fore gardens, but that in their great majority are occupied by automobiles for their parking.

These cases are framed within the project "Reinforcement of the inclusive recycling in Quinta Normal". Project awarded by "Nazca" and the cooperative "La Ciudad Posible-Chile" to develop together with the Municipality of Quinta Normal the reinforcement of the work carried out by the base recyclers of the municipality. Within the project that lasted a total of 12 months, one of the points to develop was the improvement of the environments of the recycling in the commune (5 months) in which 8 green points and a clean point were diagnosed, in three of them the environment was intervened because the spaces were considered that more negative externalities had, as it is the case of the existence of a micro garbage and the inappropriate use of the automobiles using the public place as parking. In the other places a graphic communication work was carried out to indicate the material to be recycled and to announce the existence of a green spot in the neighborhood.

In both cases, in the first instance, the analysis of the site was developed by the team with non-participating observation, and municipal representatives; in each visit to the site, a space for conversation was created with the leader to whom the project was presented, and information was obtained about the site and its uses. Once this contact was generated, a workshop was held to show the intervention proposal with disused materials to the participating community. Subsequently, in each place, the intervention proposal is shown, in order to then coordinate workdays in the field agreed upon with each participating community. The materials used for the interventions were donated pallets, to seal the pallets converted into garden boxes recycled oil was used for domestic consumption, incorporating sustainability issues into the project.
Diagram 1. Project Stages Strengthening Inclusive Recycling in Quinta Normal.

Source: La Ciudad Posible Chile

2.3.1. Description of the work done in Case 2: Green Spot at Elderly Headquarters, Aguirre Street
The green point is located and managed by the headquarters of the Elderly Adult of the neighborhood unit 37 of the commune of Quinta Normal, it is his faculty to manage the sports field that is by its side. In front of the headquarters there is a condominium of buildings that occupy this area as parking lot and there are trucks that park here at night, deteriorating the environment that older adults try to improve by placing gravel and garden boxes.

As an intervention proposal, it is proposed to gain the space of the cars for the neighbors of the place. The group of older adults were entrusted with the care of the plants and the environment.

In the participative day of installation of the garden boxes the people of the association (7), neighbors (5), children (5) volunteers of the company BASF (6), students from Design of the University Diego Portales (3) and personnel of the Municipality (9) attended. On this day, the municipality took the task of removing the soil to make the trench for the installation of the garden boxes, and the other people were responsible for sealing and embedding the garden boxes to later plant the species. Figure 6 shows before the place and figure 7 and 8 after the intervention.

Figure 6. Before the intervention on Aguirre street. Source: Own elaboration.
2.3.2. Description of the work done in Case 3: Clean Point, Huérfanos street at Cruchaga Montt

The clean point is located at the intersections of Huérfanos street at Cruchaga Montt, this recycling clean point is worked by a base recycler who operates it in a daily working day of 8 hours from Monday to Friday, in figure 9 you can see what is recycled in the place. Outside the clean spot on the sidewalk, the glass recycling bells are located where their immediate surroundings have been transformed into a micro garbage dump, as photograph Nº10 shows. The project generated a
delimitation of the street as it is observed in figures 12 and 13 of the containers of recycling of glass conforming an instance for the encounter with vertical garden pots with medicinal plants that the neighbors could consume. The recycler oversaw the watering and caring of the plants.

For the workshops summoned, only the directress attended and for the participatory day of installation of the vertical gardens as shown in figure 11 the people of the board of neighbors did not attend and only 2 neighbors went to the activity, product of the low partnership that there is in this place, and the low representation of the board of neighbors is that it was not possible to conceive a working group. The day's field work was attended by volunteers from the Diego Portales University Design (3) staff of the Municipality (9) and the base recycler with his wife who accompanies him in the work of separating waste. On this day, the municipality took the responsibility for the task of removing the soil in order to make the trench and embed the garden boxes, and the rest of the people were in charge of sealing and embedding the garden boxes in order to later plant the species.

**Figure 9.** Image of the Clean Spot

![Image of the Clean Spot](source: Own elaboration)

**Figure 10.** Before the intervention. Source: Own elaboration.
Figure 11. Working day in the field

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 12. Intervention completed

Source: Own elaboration
3. Conclusions
Transforming spaces with a civic participation undoubtedly points to the construction of social capital, since once the intervention in the appropriation of the place has been carried out, this social capital is interwoven with spaces conducive to the meeting and significance of these.

In the three cases analyzed, one of the common points in it, is the replicability of the methodology and the proposals, thus taking advantage of the capacities that are installed within the community, as well as to provide continuity to the project or to develop another initiative of similar characteristics. In the case 2 of the public area, the local youth who were inserted in a drug prevention program developed furniture with pallets that were installed this year giving continuity to what was conceived before. Another important point to develop was the environmental and economic sustainability, with respect to the existing conditions of the local reality where the initiatives were inserted. With respect to citizen participation, which is present in a central way in each of the stages, the community involved in case 1 and case 2 participated in decision making, in the management and in the execution of the square itself, which ensured a care of the environment by gestating the appropriation of the place, but not so in case 3 analyzed, since the null participation of local actors, neighbors and leaders of the place detonated that to the week of installed the plants and a pair of flowerpots have been subtracted and finally the burning of the space after 6 months of operation, what if generated the intervention in this place was that during the time that was active a micro-garbage was not generated.

The re-articulation of neighborhood coexistence and the strengthening of Social Capital was generated through a concrete work experience with tangible results and a multisectoral coordination, which allows a direct contact between the different actors involved in the projects.

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