

COMMUNITY BUILDING FROM THE RESIGNIFICATION OF PLACES OF WORSHIP . A PROPOSAL FOR THE URBAN FRINGES IN LATIN AMERICA

Construcción de comunidad desde la resignificación del equipamiento de culto. Una propuesta para los bordes urbanos en latinoamérica

Construção de comunidade a partir da ressignificação do equipamento de culto. Uma proposta para as bordas urbanas na América Latina

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Fotografía del borde sur de la ciudad de Bogotá
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ABSTRACT

The urban fringes of Latin American cities are the result of the accelerated growth that entails the formation of new settlements, that do not meet the basic needs of their inhabitants, and where the facilities have lost their meaning as a space to build the social and urban fabric. Starting from this problem, this text addresses the development of a place of worship that incorporates the concept of device as a piece of social articulation. The proposal starts from the analysis and diagnosis of the area and proposes two intervention scales under the "option generator model" (Carvajalino-Bayona, 1985) framework. The first consists of the improvement of the neighborhood in its main urban structures, while the second consists of the development of the architectural project that integrates worship activities with the dynamics of the neighborhood, from a multifunctional perspective. In this sense, urban relationships are strengthened, but at the same time, give continuity to the reflection raised from the design, where the participatory process is an opportunity to build dialogue and social fabric between the players involved, which in this case are part of communities in conditions of vulnerability.

Keywords: Urban fringe, community facilities, urban improvement, community participation, flexible design

RESUMEN

El borde urbano de las ciudades latinoamericanas es resultado del acelerado crecimiento que conlleva la formación de nuevos asentamientos que no suplen las necesidades básicas de sus habitantes, y donde el equipamiento, ha perdido significado como espacio constructor del tejido social y urbano. A partir de esta problemática, el texto aborda el desarrollo de un equipamiento de culto que incorpora el concepto de dispositivo como pieza de articulación social. La propuesta arranca del análisis y diagnóstico del sector y plantea dos escalas de intervención en el marco del "modelo generador de opciones" (Carvajalino-Bayona, 1985). La primera consiste en el mejoramiento del barrio en sus estructuras urbanas principales y la segunda, en el desarrollo del proyecto arquitectónico que integra las actividades de culto con las dinámicas del barrio desde una mirada multifuncional. En este sentido, las relaciones urbanas se fortalecen, pero a su vez, dan continuidad a la reflexión planteada desde el diseño, en la cual el proceso participativo es una oportunidad de construcción de diálogo y tejido social entre los actores involucrados que, en este caso, forman parte de comunidades en condiciones de vulnerabilidad.

Palabras Clave: Borde urbano, equipamiento comunitario, mejoramiento urbano, participación comunitaria, diseño flexible

RESUMO

As bordas urbanas das cidades latino-americanas são fruto do crescimento acelerado que acarreta a formação de novos assentamentos que não atendem às necessidades básicas de seus habitantes e onde o equipamento perdeu seu significado como espaço de construção do tecido social e urbano. A partir desta problemática, o texto aborda o desenvolvimento de um equipamento de culto que incorpora o conceito de dispositivo como peça de articulação social. A proposta parte da análise e diagnóstico do setor e propõe duas escalas de intervenção no âmbito do "modelo gerador de opções" (Carvajalino-Bayona, 1985). A primeira consiste na melhoria do bairro em suas estruturas urbanas principais e a segunda implica o desenvolvimento do projeto arquitetônico que integra as atividades de culto com as dinâmicas do bairro numa perspectiva multifuncional. Neste sentido, as relações urbanas se fortalecem, mas, por sua vez, dão continuidade à reflexão levantada a partir do projeto, de acordo com a qual o processo participativo é uma oportunidade de construção de diálogo e tecido social entre os atores envolvidos que, neste caso, fazem parte de comunidades em condições de vulnerabilidade.

Palavras-Chave: Borda urbana, equipamento comunitário, melhoria urbana, participação comunitária, projeto flexível

INTRODUCTION

1 This text is part of the research process of the graduate project “*Un equipamiento de culto como dispositivo en el borde urbano de Soacha*” (a place of worship as a device in the urban fringes of Soacha) (Romero, E, 2019), developed as a project with emphasis on research and tied to the research incubator in Analysis and Project, attached to the Design Faculty of the Catholic University of Colombia; an initiative which, in this case, seeks the articulation of institutions with problems in real contexts, and the generation of ties between academic programs and research activities, through the participation in the incubator.

The problematic stated around the importance of facilities as binding links between social fabrics, and the need for forming spaces for living in marginal sectors of the urban fringes, is opened within this research. However, when these processes consider the community and the variables that characterize each context, architecture can be the element of communication between the territory and the community and, at the same time, it allows rethinking, from design, the way of making facilities looking to new dynamics for their social articulation¹.

Under these conditions, on proposing the development of a facility, it becomes necessary to include the notion of device as a set of relations that go beyond the idea of the architectural object, that is to say, a “network of knowledge/power where the school, barracks, convent, hospital, prison, and factory are circumscribed, and not each one of them separately” (García, 2011, p. 2), to attend the needs of a specific community. And although this vision suggests an articulation between the role of the building and the idea of de-

Figure 1

Ángel de la Guarda Chapel, located in the Bellavista Baja neighborhood, at the time of the proposal.
Source: Edwin Romero (2019).



**Figure 2**

General view of the Bellavista Baja neighborhood, in the municipality of Soacha, to the southeast of Bogotá. Source: Edwin Romero (2019).

vice, the central idea focuses on the resignification of the facility as a community meeting place for the population in the urban fringe sectors [Figure 1].

The area where this project takes place is located in the municipality of Soacha, to the southeast of the city of Bogotá, in the Sucre Citadel, comprising the neighborhoods of San Rafael Alto, Buenos Aires, and Bellavista Baja, characterized by the presence of social conflicts and environmental issues like mass scale removal, the lack of basic sanitary infrastructure, and the contamination of the old Terreros reservoir by raw sewage. This is added to insecurity, high poverty indexes, difficult living conditions and accessibility, derived from its origin outside the planning processes (Municipal Mayor's Office of Soacha, 2018) [Figure 2].

RESIGNIFYING FACILITIES ON THE URBAN FRINGES

En *La arquitectura de la ciudad*, Aldo Rossi states that “it is logical to assume that the success of residential complexes is related to the presence of public services and collective facilities...” (1966, 0. 52), and he mentions facilities as structuring and structural components of the city, of great value when it comes to building the urban space or making an improvement plan in sectors that so require. These, likewise “play a double role as, apart from providing essential services, they contribute to the construction and the strengthening of collective life” (Franco & Zabala, 2012, p. 12); and even though the facilities are destined to a specific role, their purpose transcends the fact of covering needs, to a more valuable part for a city. However, in recent years, facilities have been characterized by being spaces imbued with specific roles that cover a program proposed by the local governments for their construction within an urban fabric, sometimes built without the consent and accompaniment of the community, in processes that ignore the real needs of a population group.

FACILITIES AS DEVICES

Urban facilities are edifications that cover specific needs of a population with the role of being

Primary components of the city structure, that contribute to its organization and planning from their strategic value, particularly in non-consolidated urban settings, where their role, identity, and meaning are crucial for the effective articulation with the urban fabric (Ovalle & Páez, 2017, p. 44).

On the other hand, the device is understood as a set of networks that handles an urgency, in this case, of a community (García, 2011), but one that is not always manifested in an architectural edification. To find the mid-point between the facility and the device, namely what brings the functional and formal notion of the facility together with the open and undetermined aspects of the device (Vega, 2017), the notions of flexible and multifunctional are added, starting from which the inhabitants can have a facility as an institution that, at the same time, includes activities assigned by the community's own dynamic.

However, when considering a place of worship, where liturgy is mixed with educational, cultural, health events, money raising events, among others that are more community based, the physical space is an open component that is always available to create and formalize projects for the economic growth of the population, and not to just mitigate the shortfalls in basic services, but rather to build a social fabric focused on improving their quality of life.

PLACES OF WORSHIP AND THE COMMUNITY

The most important factor during the formation process of the city and the neighborhoods is the community. Facing the generalized lack of opportunities and the amount of unsatisfied basic needs, this represents the joining of the people towards a given end, which constitutes an important factor in the development of architectural, social, and economic projects for the benefit of specific sectors. In many cases, and in this scenario,

The neighborhood is, therefore, the “basic unit” for the identity of a community that, with some physical-spatial or socio-economic variations, builds a direct relationship between the fabrics of a population, and the cohesion and identity of a community, as an alternative formula to reduce the initial precariousness of these sectors (Ovalle & Páez, 2017, p. 47).

Within them, the people always seek the benefit for their setting. There is a leader, and people that help their leadership for the advance of the neighborhood and to carry out works

for most of the members of a community, in a given context, the interest on quality of life begins. There is insistence in that it is necessary to stop focusing on the shortfalls, and to begin working on personal growth, the realization of potentialities, the subjective welfare, and other similar topics. (Ardila, 2003, p. 162).

It is in this context of the urban fringe, of community organization and work, where many facilities are developed without planning, and whose purpose is to mitigate the problems and to provide opportunities to their inhabitants to access spaces for education, health, trade, and where the places of worship act as a binding element for communities, where from their leaders to the young being educated, they take part in the creation of new meeting spaces. In these marginal spaces, interventions by local governments are not commonplace; non-governmental organizations have a greater presence, like foundations, architecture firms, or higher education institutions which, from academia, focus their energy on community work to develop the projects. Despite this, within these processes, the question arises about how to develop a contemporary place of worship.

METHODOLOGY

This project is developed using the concept of resignification in places of workshop and work with the community, following the methodology based on the “opinion generator model”, outlined by Weber and Pyatock (1976) and, in particular, that retaken by Carvajalino-Bayona (1985), which consisted in performing a specific process for working with communities from academia, comprising two fundamental parts. The first consists in the analysis and diagnosis of the place, which involves a general proposal for improving the neighborhood and defining the possible projects to be done in the future. The second part comprises developing a place of worship through dialog and participation processes with the community (Díaz Osorio, 2019).

The work is summarized in a proposal from two scales of intervention, at a neighborhood level and at an architectural object level, which are developed together through four processes done in chronological order [Figure 3]:

1. Approach to the problem. This is a first approach to the community to get to know the place. This work begins with a scheduled visit to the neighborhoods of Sucre Citadel, as well as to its communal leaders, to hear their opinions, and to listen to the needs identified over time.
2. Research and knowledge. During this process, information is obtained from previous research about the urban, social, and architectural components of the neighborhood which, later, are analyzed and summarized in a diagnosis. This is the main contribution for the neighborhood improvement proposal.
3. Generator of design ideas. Here, the first approaches of architectural design are made from the interaction with the community of each neighborhood, to whom these will then be presented to. It is at this point where reflection is made about the role of the place of worship in the construction of the city and its influence on the inhabitants. To address this, a search is made of the standout projects in similar contexts, to identify strategies for its development and adaptation (Pava, Betancur & Páez, 2018) which, along with participative design, allow determining the opportunities that places of worship can provide. The parameters considered for the development of a similar project are: location, morphology, urban fabric, organization, community, material, spatiality, and appropriation.
4. Concretion and evaluation. Finally, each one of the different options generated are evaluated by the community in a presentation where one is chosen to be developed, together with one of the assigned professionals. This development is participative: the community expresses their needs and expectations for the project, monitoring it, and evaluating and approving the final project.

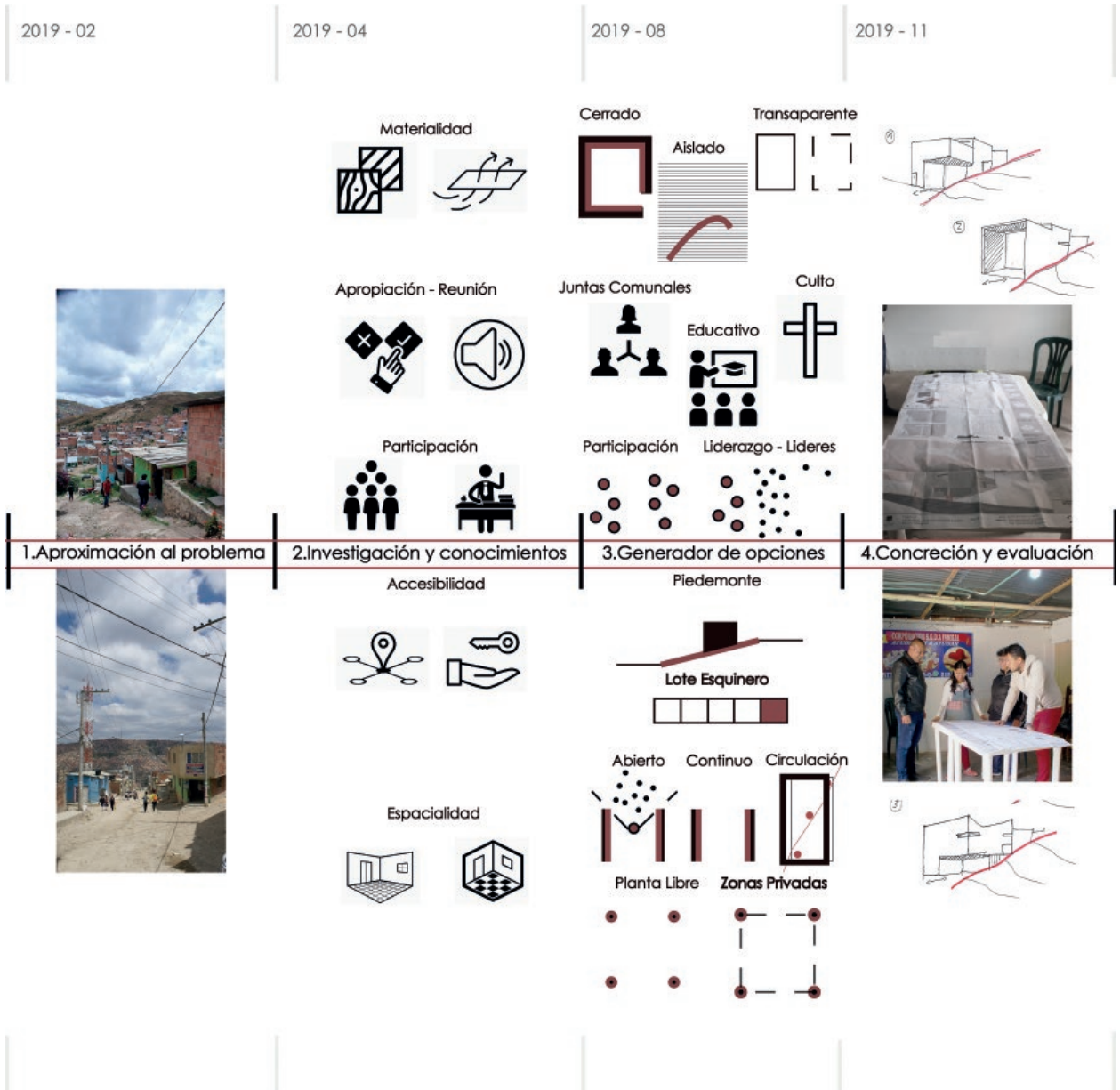


Figure 3
Summary of the work methodology, in chronological order, of the work done with the community. Fuente: Edwin Romero (2019).

RESULTS

From the academic point of view, the approach to these urban fringe contexts, and the interaction with real users and problems, outlines an exercise that brings academia and communities together in participative processes that enrich learning, in a relationship of reciprocity that transcends the academic sphere. The results of each one of the processes, presented methodologically, are presented below.

APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

A field trip is made during the first phase of the project, which is a key exercise for its development, because it opens the panorama and creates a space for communication with the community in an exploratory phase. The gathering of information onsite was divided into several issues that, as overlapping layers, allow seeing the problems present in the neighborhood. In this measure, accessibility, the main ecological structure, natural risks, the public space, the network of facilities, land uses, road structure, state of consolidation of the dwellings, and the demographic information are aspects to identify problems and needs, looking to make a design proposal at a global scale.

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE

This study by layers allows building a scenario of Sucre Citadel and the Bellavista Bajo neighborhood, where the following conditions were found:

- **Accessibility:** The two main access roads and the entire road network is in a poor state. Within the neighborhood, there is a central access road, which runs from the lower part alongside the lagoon, to the improvised public transportation station located in the upper part of the neighborhood. Likewise, the transportation systems are currently bus companies with inter-municipal routes, together with an informal network that carries inhabitants from the lower part of the neighborhood to their homes.
- **Facilities:** The neighborhood has three facilities that try to cover the needs of more than 3,000 inhabitants, showing a complete deficit in the basic services.
- **Land uses:** 70% of the sites are habitational, 29% have a mixed use, and 1% are destined to facilities.
- **State of consolidation:** The buildings are classified following their level of consolidation given by the state of the construction and the floors built. In this way, 51% correspond to single floor constructions, 25% to 2 floors; and 15% to 3 floors; with 80% having a high consolidation level, 15% a medium one, and 5%, low. Starting from the diagnosis of the consolidation levels it is determined

Figure 4

Bellavista Baja neighborhood improvement proposal: On the left, the analysis and diagnosis plan of the area, prepared on five key aspects: main ecological structure, accessibility, public space, facilities, and the state of consolidation of the existing buildings. The plan on the right summarizes the improvement proposal at a neighborhood scale, emphasizing the network of basic facilities needed and their articulation with the public space and the ecological structure. Source: Plans prepared by Edwin Romero (2019).

that the low consolidation sites are susceptible to being intervened, in order to replace their current use for new dwellings or to build public space and possible facilities.

The neighborhood improvement proposal comes from these approaches, focused on the welfare of the inhabitants regarding the environmental, cultural, and educational aspects, as well as the road infrastructure, public space, improvements of dwellings, and trade [Figure 4]. In this way, the intention is to improve accessibility using different alternatives, like the creation of a road network formed by sidewalks and roads, the recovery of the main ecological structure by using residual free spaces and reforestation with native species, to improve the environmental component. On the other hand, the 79 dwellings with low consolidation are relocated within the neighborhood, and by releasing areas for public space, this passes from 0.3m² to 1.7m² of public space per inhabitant. As for the facility network, the idea is to strengthen the existing ones and to add a place of worship, and another with a cultural approach, both located on community sites.



GENERATOR OF DESIGN IDEAS

The reflection outlined around the role of the place of worship led to the selection of a range of projects that share their situation on the urban fringe of Latin American cities, where analysis was applied to establish conditions like the distribution of activities and the conditions of localization. The projects chosen are:

- Cueva de luz Sifais (2016) - Architect Entre Nos Atelier - La Carpio, San José (Costa Rica).
- San Miguel Archangel Chapel (2011) - Architect Javier Corvalan – Villa Elisa, Asunción, (Paraguay).
- La casa de la oración (“*the house of prayer*”) (2018) - Architect Natura Futura Arquitectura – Babahoyo (Ecuador).
- El Faro Chapel (2013) - Coovite Architecture Cooperative – Medellín (Colombia).

In addition, these projects are characterized on having similar problems and appearances to those of the project being developed, from their scale to problems like security, the abandonment by local governments, and the lack of resources. Each proposal focuses on resolving problems without ignoring their inhabitants in the design and construction of the project, and where the participation of the community is the main factor, in order to create a sense of belonging to weave the social fabrics. Likewise, this exercise allows making place of worship projects in urban fringes visible, which includes the diversity of activities as a common factor, adjusted to the needs of the community [Figure 5].

Regarding the development of the facility itself, this is done on two strips of land of 6 meters in length by 12 meters in depth, where the first is a corner plot and is empty, and the second is adjoining, with a maximum slope of 23%, and is owned by the Anglican community. Together, there is a site of 144 m², where the maximum height permitted is 3 floors, depending on the width of the street. The adjoining plot is occupied by a dwelling with a low consolidation that acts as a community diner; a meeting place for the community, a parochial house, and a center for worship. In this context, and following the aforementioned “generator of options model” methodology, three proposals are presented:

- Proposal 1: Two independent volumes limited by the size of the entire sites and considering the urban morphology of the place and the shape of the current block.
- Proposal 2: Two volumes connected and related to the topography and with the main opening of the chapel to the street, to allow extending the space towards the outside. The maximum height is 3 floors, and it considers the roles and space of the chapel.
- Proposal 3: A stereotomy integrated to the context, following the idea of a “massive, rocky, weighty architec-



Fotografía: Federico Cairoli, 2011

Capilla San Miguel Arcangel

Arquitectos: **Javier Corvalan**
Violeta Pérez
 Ubicación: **Villa Elisa, Paraguay**
 Año: 2011
 Área: 180 m²

Inicialmente pensada como un futuro proyecto de autoconstrucción, el proyecto fue propuesto con tecnología tradicional en concreto dada la facilidad de mano de obra de sus pobladores en este rubro. La capilla propone formalmente los elementos básicos y ordenados funcionalmente según dicta el rito católico.



Líderes
 La comunidad al servicio de varias personas

Líderes: Javier Corvalan y Violeta Pérez

Dentro de las líneas de trabajo de la oficina, el proyecto Cueva de Luz fue diseñado ad honorem, en donde Entre Nos Atelier desde el 2011 se convierte en "socio estratégico" de la comunidad de la Carpio y de la fundación SIFAIS una iniciativa privada sin fines de lucro que promueve la superación personal y la integración social.

Cueva de Luz SIFAIS

Arquitectos: **Entre Nos Atelier**
 Ubicación: **La carpio, San Jose Costa Rica**
 Año: 2016
 Área: 1000 m²



Fotografía: Ingrid Johanning, 2016



Participación
 Todos son Líderes

Líderes: Alejandro Vallejo, Michael Smith, María Stella Fernandez (Líder Social)
 Federico Cairoli



Fotografía: Natura Futura Arquitectura, 2018

La casa de la oración

Arquitectos: **Natura Futura**
Arquitectura
 Ubicación: **Babahoyo, Ecuador**
 Año: 2018
 Área: 200 m²

Uno de los objetivos del espacio es el trabajo con niños, la realización de talleres y prácticas sostenibles, generándose una apropiación de la ciudadanía del espacio y permite un proceso de vigilancia del sector. La idea de permitir una arquitectura completamente permeable, que sostenga el discurso de ir conectando la ciudad



Participación
 Todos son Líderes

Líderes: Jose Fernando Gomez, Fausto Quiroz y comunidad de Babahoyo

Es un proyecto que reforma el espacio actual para magnificar la experiencia de reunión comunitaria. Las acciones de diseño son sencillas mediante sistemas constructivos locales y austeros. Este proyecto representa una comunidad organizada que lleva construyendo el barrio más de veintisiete años.

Capilla el Faro

Arquitectos: **Cooperativa de**
Arquitectura coovite
 Ubicación: **Comuna 8, Medellín Colombia**
 Área: 54 m²
 Año: 2013



Fotografía: Natura Futura Arquitectura, 2018



Participación
 Todos son Líderes

Líderes: Coovite, Comunidad el Faro

Figure 5
 Analysis of places of worship projects located on the urban fringes of Latin American cities. Source: Sketches prepared by Edwin Romero using planimetric information and photographs of the projects (2019).

ture, placed on the land as if it had been born there. It is architecture that seeks the light, which perforates its walls so that the light comes in. It is the architecture of the podium, of the base. That of the stylobate. It is, summarizing the architecture of the cave" (Baeza, 1997, p. 2). In the final image, the volume is suggested with subtractions in the chapel's opening and in the indoor spaces. This model is characterized on having natural lighting in its spaces, and



Figure 6

Layouts with the different design options studied with the community for the development of the place of worship.
Source: Edwin Romero (2019).

where it aside from connecting to the topography of the place, a relationship with the urban shape is sought.

For the community, this proposal is the best one, because of its shape, functionality, management of natural light, and its implementation, which it was chosen as the new place of worship for the Bella-vista Baja neighborhood's community [Figure 6].

CONCRETION AND EVALUATION

The project comprises an urban proposal focused on improving the surrounding streets and the construction of the facility. The intention is to connect the sidewalks with the project and the design of the specific property, both for the public space and inside the building. The permeability, as Henao Quintero (2015) suggests, establishes a sensitive limit between the building and the public aspect for the comfort of the passersby, and merges the first floor of the building with the public space of the context. Having an open corner allows that the space is extended, and, in special events organized by the community, the roads are integrated to the project. In this way, the relationship with the context outlines a sensitive boundary (Muñoz & Gutiérrez, 2019), that welcomes the project and the different spaces it forms.

The chapel is located on this ground floor room, as the most accessible point from the sidewalk. Inside, it has a main altar, the sacristy, and the place for the congregation [Figure 7]. In this way, the chapel is part of the public space, integrating both the congregation and the passersby in a single space, and where the two activities blur their boundaries beyond the property separation, marking a key position facing the immediate context. Added to this, the zenithal handling of natural light generates an image of secrecy and discretion towards the outside.

DISCUSSION

This work looks to highlight the importance of places of worship as a structural element of the city and its visions as a monument in the city (Rossi, 1966), recognizing its meaning within a social fabric that, from the analysis of a set of projects in similar contexts, shows that these are forms of intervention which the communities on the urban fringes need in order to solve different

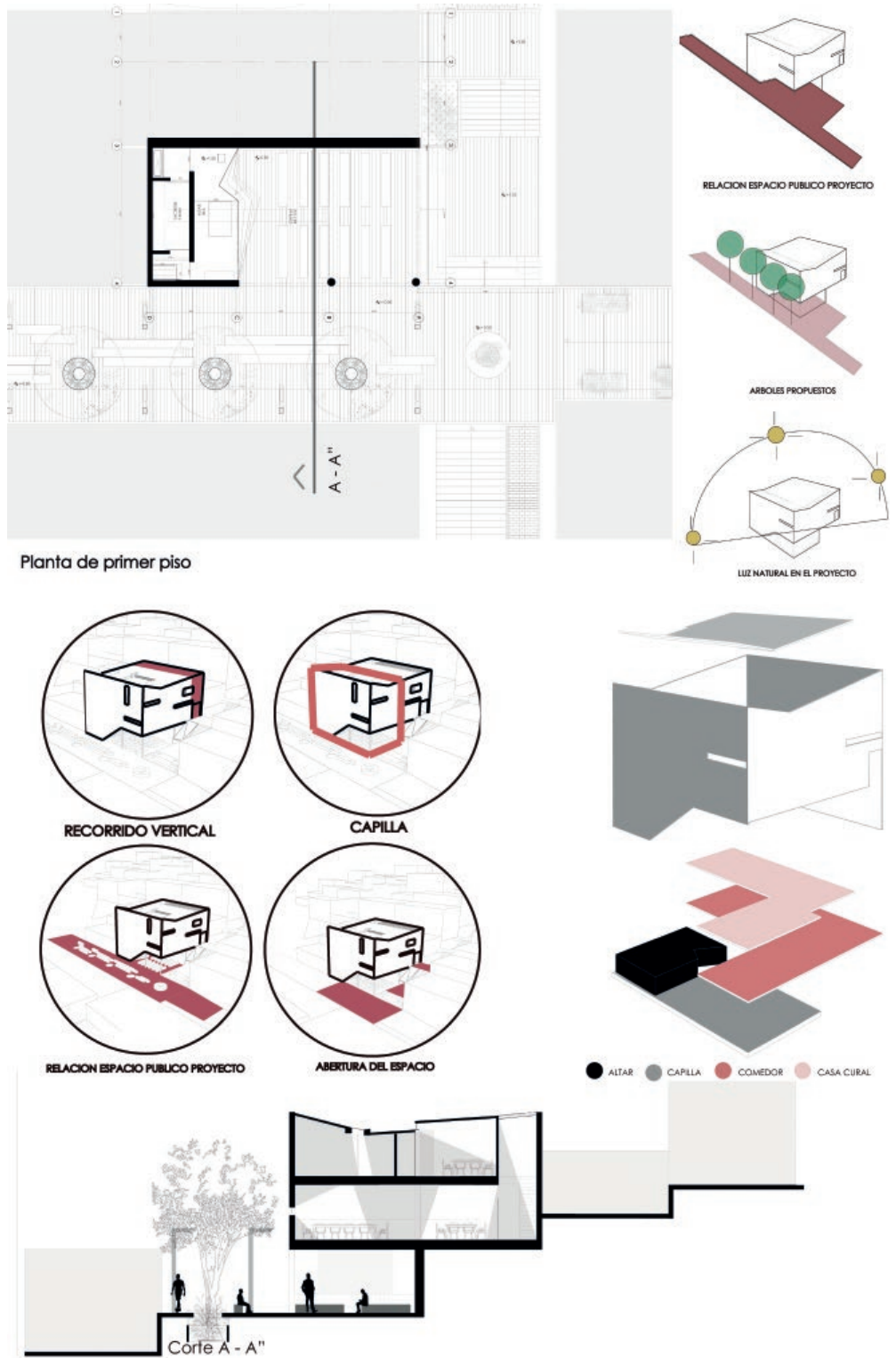


Figure 7
 Layouts of zoning and relation of the activities with the public space. General floorplan of the first floor and A-A cross section. Source: Drawings made by Edwin Romero (2019).

problems, and to cover needs that have existed since the creation of these neighborhoods. This idea is one of the alternatives to recover the role of the place of worship as a structural element when thinking and building the city, in this case, for a community that, on considering their needs, establishes priorities when proposing facilities-devices, as a way of suggesting projects from the community participation.

Multifunctionality takes an important role in resignification, as facilities and as devices. In fact, when the equipment offers multiple roles and uses, it breaks the scheme of its utilitarian nature and becomes an element of interest, integration, and development for the community which, on some occasions, can be materialized in an object or being part of the network that the community builds, which can act as a

“machine for seeing and speaking, that works coupled to given historical systems of enunciation and visibility (...). For example, the prison would be an optic machine that allows seeing without being seen, a role that must not necessarily be transported to other devices like, for example, a social movement, a literary genre, a scientific discourse, or a rule of law, that are not inscribed in a system of visibility, but rather of enunciation or, more specifically, where the leading one is enunciation over visibility (García, 2011, p.4).

CONCLUSION

The contribution of this project resides in transcending the idea of facility, on incorporating the concept of device as a structuring component that fosters the sense of belonging in the community. On making them take part in the process, this increases their interest in the project, making opinions and presenting points of view about what is considered as the most suitable option for their neighborhood. Concretely, the community intervened here manifested interest for a multifunctional facility, which would abandon their component for worship, would attend the urgent need of spaces for community use, like educational workshops, theater plays, communal meetings, political events, or activities of the public entities, etc. The religious use for mass and catechism is maintained as another element that contributes from its construction and appropriation in the social fabric of the neighborhood.

On incorporating the concept of device, it is possible to make that the facility acquires a privileged value in the work with communities in unplanned neighborhoods, and that the field of action is extended from the professional view present in this urban fringe contexts. There, where currently this situation of marginality prevails, and where an architectural intervention of this nature allows providing continuity to the solution of the problems there are, thanks to the strong attachment of its inhabitants, and its potential sense of organization of the community work.

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