PLACEMAKING – TRANSFORMACIÓN DE UN LUGAR EN EL ASENTAMIENTO HUMANO SANTA JULIA, PIURA, PERÚ

PLACEMAKING: THE TRANSFORMATION OF A PLACE IN THE SANTA JULIA HUMAN SETTLEMENT, PIURA, PERU

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RESUMEN

Al gestionar los actuales desafíos en el desarrollo urbano, se debe encontrar un equilibrio entre los enfoques de la planificación oficial y las necesidades locales. Las dificultades que enfrenta el desarrollo urbano participativo deben contrastarse con el fenómeno de "hacer ciudades", que se observa en ciudades de América Latina desde hace muchos años. El artículo describe una experiencia en búsqueda a una nueva metodología de hacer intervención en la ciudad y el espacio público que, desde la academia, permitan empoderar a sus habitantes para la reivindicación de sus derechos. Dicha experiencia consistió en intervenir en un espacio público seleccionado de la ciudad de Piura, Perú. Bajo el término de Placemaking, se articularon objetivos académicos y sociales mediante el mejoramiento de las condiciones físicas de la ciudad. De ella se expone el proceso de trabajo en campo, que permitió identificar las necesidades, afectaciones y vocación del lugar; el cual produjo un diagnóstico que sirvió de base para el desarrollo de los diseños, programar actividades con la comunidad y grupos de apoyo; así como, la gestión de recursos para la construcción y el seguimiento del impacto generado en el lugar.

Palabras clave
espacio público, intervenciones urbanas, asentamientos humanos, utopías

ABSTRACT

When managing current challenges in urban development, a balance must be found between official planning approaches and local needs. The difficulties faced by participatory urban development should match the phenomenon of "city-making", which has been observed in Latin American cities for many years. This article describes an experience that sought a new methodology for intervention in cities and public spaces which, starting from academia, empowers inhabitants to insist on their rights. This experience consisted in intervening in a public space in the city of Piura, Peru. Under the concept of placemaking, academic and social objectives come together through the improvement of the physical conditions of cities. The fieldwork presented made it possible to identify the needs, pretenses and uses of the place; in turn, a diagnostic was produced that served as the basis for the development of the designs, programming of activities with the community, and support groups, as well as for the management of construction resources and monitoring of the impact on the place.

Keywords
public space, urban interventions, human settlements, utopias

INTRODUCTION

Currently the planet is becoming a more urban world. In 2017, 4.1 million people (55% of the world's population) lived in urban areas. That's twice as much as it was twenty years ago (World Bank, 2018). The cities of Latin America are specifically in an important transition. Also in 2017, the urban population here reached 80.7% of the total (CELADE - Population Division of ECLAC, 2017).

The social and economic consequences of cities development are complex. Especially when cities grow very fast and without control, problems arise with the basic services of the inhabitants. So, How to meet this demand of the city? The "quality of life" factor becomes the global objective, since it determines the political, economic and social stability of future urban landscapes.

The city must be for its people, as stated by the "right to the city" associated with the thought of the sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1967). The proclamation describes the socio-economic segregation in the city in the 1960s and the consequent collective re-appropriation, in view of the discrimination of large segments of the population.

Although the same situation does not prevail today, this call returns and gets a new meaning: the basic necessities for life are becoming increasingly important in face of the fragmentation, segregation and inequality of cities.

At the same time, a city is defined by its public spaces. Without public space, the city is unimaginable for us. In fact, "the public space defines the quality of the city, as it indicates the quality of life of people and the quality of the citizenship of its inhabitants." (Borja and Zaida, 2003: 16). The different social and aesthetic qualities of its public spaces shape the character of cities, rather than their topographic characteristics or the peculiarities of their construction typologies. It is the place where the necessary community expressions are developed to rebuild social networks and improve the quality of life in the city. Consequently, the public space should give continuity to the city and maintain an important role in the urban network also it should be multifunctional, accessible and inclusive (ibid.).

In planning practice, public space has been given a decisive role in urban development in general. A common feature is the absence of a public space facilitating community life, which is explained from its origin linked to urban processes outside the urban planning provisions. Many times we find situations of this type: neglected squares and parks, public spaces that do not respond to needs of the population or the context and, therefore, are uninhabited areas, or are closed, exclusive and unavailable places for the use of the total population (Low, 2005).

In the last decades there has been a notable improvement in the levels of provision of basic infrastructure and urban equipment, as well as in the habitability conditions of cities, both in the quality of housing, as in the provision of urban equipment. However, much remains to be done so that there are urban spaces in which material and environmental conditions prevail suitable for all, and the "right to the city" becomes effective. "Cities are able to provide something for each one only because, and only if so, they have been created for each one" (Jacobs, 1967: 273). Therefore, a new design process is needed, one more focused on the context and the process than on the final product (Antonopoulou, Chondros and Koutsari, 2015).

The case of the city of Piura, Peru, is a clear example of the problem most Latin American cities are facing. The strong population growth is reflected in numerous signs of congestion of all urban systems. According to the citizen's perception of quality of life, most of the population is not satisfied with the public space available in the place where they live (Schroeder). A large part of the city does not have prior urban planning, due, in large part, to the form of land occupation, which causes public spaces, infrastructure and equipment services not to be provided or planned in advance.

The project presented in this article consists of the construction of a playground for children, whose objective is to materialize an urban claim based on the involvement and active participation of local residents. This idea was searching to transform a degraded space, characterized by insecurity, visual and environmental pollution, and turn it into a place of opportunity, worthy and for the joy of all.

Ultimately, it is about encouraging formal city planning, carrying out a project with an integration and participatory approach to achieve greater sustainability in urban development.

The park is located in the Santa Julia human settlement in the city of Piura. Santa Julia is characterized by having a high rate of crime, criminality and micro-commercialization of drugs. It is a fragmented area where public space is not enjoyed, but rather avoided. Public spaces and playgrounds are needed for the great amount of children in the sector that grew and continues to grow informally.

However, it should be noted that the neighbors themselves have stimulated the process of improving such park.

In the project the placemaking concept is used as a link between sustainability and habitability. This placemaking provides concrete actions and results that foster broader sustainability goals, such as smart growth, accessibility on foot and by bike, public transport or relevant urban space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A city must be planned for the people who live in it and must be able to respond to the needs and desires of its inhabitants. The architect Jan Gehl criticizes, in this context, the neglect of the human dimension in city planning. Both old and new cities require redefining the assumptions in which projects are planned and prioritized, focusing more on people's needs (Gehl, 2011). In the current practice of many cities and municipalities throughout the world, the inhabitants themselves are poorly informed about urban development projects. There is, in this way, a lack of integration and participation in current planning.

The term "placemaking" is understood as a tool for planning, designing and managing public spaces with a community approach. It can be seen as a way to transform non-lieux (Augé, 1995). According to Augé, a non-lieux is a place that one ignores or avoids, such as parking lots, transport terminals, wasteland. They are not places because they lack character and are not attractive to anyone.

In general terms, this perspective refers to the strategy of an economic development of "creating quality places where people want to live, work, play and learn" (Wyckoff, 2014: 2). British planning scientist Patsy Healey (1997) conceives placemaking as an approach to territorial planning, based on the search for the improvement of space quality and quality of life. The discussion about the understanding of the place does not only facilitates the planning process, but also "the idea of the place having a role in defining the identity of social groups and this collective identity should contribute to generating social cohesion" (from Magalhaes, Healey and Madanipour , 2002: 53). Placemaking can thus contribute to the formation of identity and the creation of social cohesion and, therefore, have a social structuring effect. More than simply promoting a better urban design, it facilitates creative patterns of use, paying special attention to the physical, cultural and social identities that define a place. It is about looking, listening and asking questions to people who live, work and play in a specific space, to discover their needs and aspirations (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). In this context O'Rourke and Baldwin

suggest that placemaking is considered as a process that seeks to "involve people in the appearance, feeling and functioning of their public spaces to discover what they want and expect from a space" (2016: 103).

The beginnings of the concept of placemaking derive from the works about the place, where Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) establish a thematic and experience-based categorization, respectively, to explain the "connection" with an existing environment. In a sense of urban design, the placemaking process (and concept) evolved from Whyte's (1980) research of public squares and their use (or lack thereof) in New York.

As a tool, placemaking has evolved over time. What began as a process of activism and protests against indomitable development in American cities, has now become an instrument to link communities and neighborhoods that places special emphasis on the process, and not only on the end result. (Silberberg, 2018).

In this way, citizen participation plays a very important role. Involving target groups represents an indispensable condition for the success and sustainability of projects and programs, and allows the local population to be part of political, social and economic decisions. The traceability of decisions increases the acceptance and, therefore, the longevity of the projects (Imparato and Ruster, 2003). Vaiou also emphasizes that "participation of this kind, articulated around the reconfigurations of public space, points to forms of citizenship (urban) and underlines the need to consider the basic dynamics expressed in participation, together with its role as space formation " (2018:190).

This perspective of urban transformation is concerned with bottom-up projects, processes of empowerment and appropriation of citizens who want them to participate in the decision making of interventions in public spaces, considering them as experts of its closest environment and as vital actors for the generation of places, which facilitate civic engagement and community interaction (Webb, 2013; Project for Public Spaces, 2016).

The activities are often led by movements of groups or neighbors (Spataro, 2016), when citizens are successful and intervene in the urban network, governments can be considered incapable or undesirable. In this context, it can be said that, although placemaking is related to formal urban planning practices, it also does so with informal practices such as DIY urban planning ("do it yourself") (Iveson, 2013) , tactical urbanism (Lydon and Garcia, 2015) or everyday urbanism (Chase, Crawford and Kaliski, 1999). Informal urbanism is often characterized by small-scale spatial practices. Along these lines, Finn (2014: 381) points out that these activities are "often innovative, sophisticated and low-cost solutions for difficult or untreated urban

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problems". Different groups, small businesses, local relations and materiality, create synergy to produce dynamic interventions that respond to the changing needs of local people. However, formal and informal placemaking interactions are by no means exclusive or perfectly separable. Fabian and Samson (2016), among others, argue that urban planners and designers have shown a growing interest in DIY urbanism.

To conclude, different actors produce spaces of their social interaction and contribute to shaping the public space, while creating urban citizenship (Vaiou, 2018). The benefits of properly using this methodology lead to the generation of positive impacts in the urban environment, as a successful place promotes comfort, health and well-being in people, enhances accessibility, strengthens community life and develops the local economy (Karacor, 2014; Antonopoulou, Chondros and Koutsari, 2015; Project for Public Spaces, 2016). In this way, a public space relevant to the place and its people is configured.

DEVELOPMENT

METHODS

Using the placemaking methodology is relevant and coherent to face the current challenges, needs and expectations of the Piura community so that it contributes to building an active public space, with identity and social cohesion. The experience presented here consisted of different progressive stages, starting from a macro level of the city to the micro level. From the first results, a long-term vision and a set of strategies to achieve were developed.

Following the method of placemaking, work begins at different sites in the city of Piura to improve public space and the quality of life for the population. The fact that the process is not strictly linear must be taken into account. However, as a starting point, contact with the population is essential.

Thus, one of the first activities carried out was to define who would participate, how and when. Another important factor was to collect the opinions of the local population, which serves to understand and analyze the needs, shortcomings and desires of the community. Next, the proposal phase was developed, in which people also participated and worked to comply with the defined project development plans. In addition, an implementation plan was carried out in stages which contemplate that, once the project has been built, work must continue with its evaluation and monitoring. Maintaining these lines of continuity allows the flexibility of the project to achieve improvements over time, according to the established objectives.

In the course of the field work, various activities have been developed and work has been done permanently with the community of the human settlement of Santa Julia.

This human settlement belongs to the Veintiséis de Octubre district and it is located at the South West end of the city of Piura, Peru (figure 1). The evolution of this sector has been taking place in three stages, which have been established by the following types: informal occupation, construction, planning and service. Given its conformation process, the area does not have economic activities promoting employment, the economic activities that are registered, are self-employment and small businesses with low levels of presence.

Although Piura is one of the regions with the greatest contribution to the national GDP, it has levels of monetary poverty that reach 35%. Certainly, the study area is characterized by being marginal urban (Municipalidad Distrital Veintiséis de Octubre, 2016).

In terms of population there is no exact data. According to the Informal Property Formalization Agency (COFOPRI, by its initials in Spanish) about 2,300 pieces of land have been formalized. Taking an approach of five family members occupying a piece of land, a population of about 12,000 inhabitants is added. About 30% are 14 years old or younger and about a half is under 25 years old. Only less than 10%, are 60 years old and older (Municipalidad Distrital Veintiséis de Octubre, 2016). According to these figures, the population that inhabits the area is quite young with a number of children above average.

On several visits and calls, continuous work was carried out with the local population and the Neighborhood Board team. In a first participatory workshop we worked on the search for answers to certain needs, through the following questions: What is the current use of public space? Who is using public space? Are there problems/conflicts? In coordination with neighborhood groups and the municipality, the feasibility of different projects was discussed.

In the next phase, a vision of a priority public space was designed; the purpose was for the neighbors to define the use, to express their ideas for the park in order to meet their needs and desires. From that approach, different dates were scheduled for visits, including participation workshops, the presentation and discussion of the proposal and the execution of the park. The design workshop was carried out through the use of maps and a participation model (Figure 2). With the model the limits for the design of the park and three zones of different sizes for children's games were defined. Based on examples and good practices from other sites, different options for the design of the park were discussed. After the workshop, a first proposal was developed which was improved together with future users.
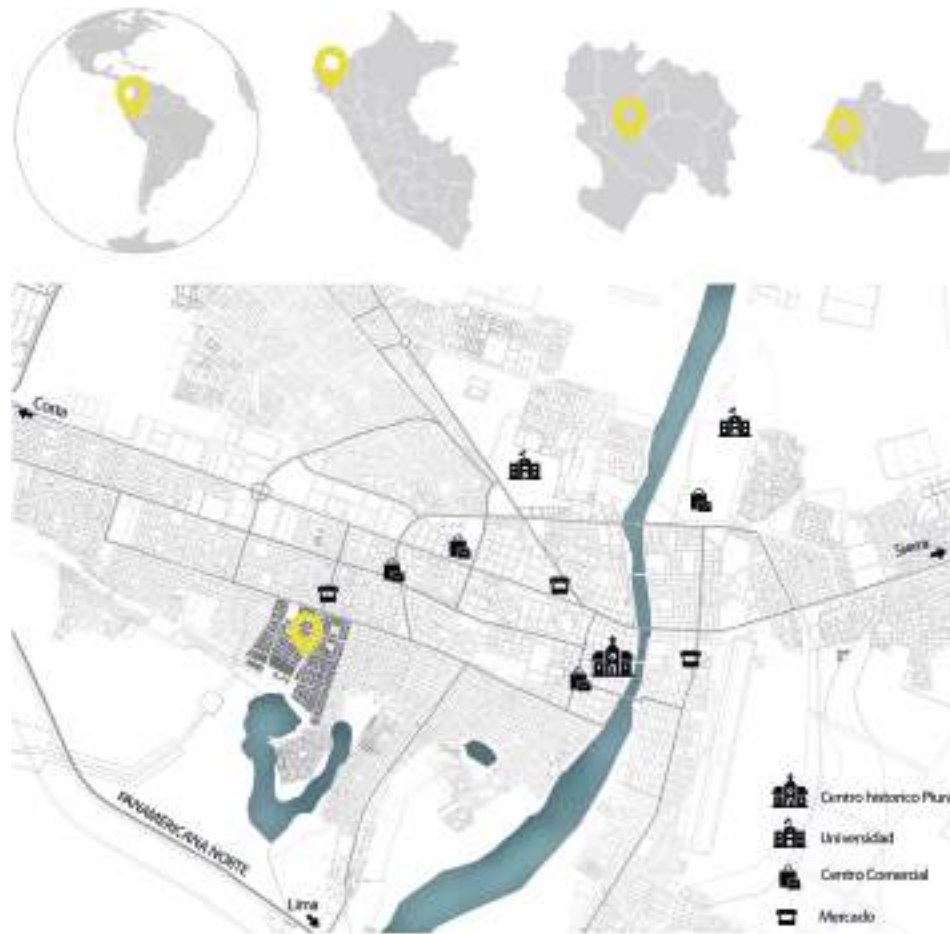
Figure 1. Location of the intervention site. Source: Made by the authors.

Figure 2. Participation workshop together with the population. Source: Photography taken by the authors.
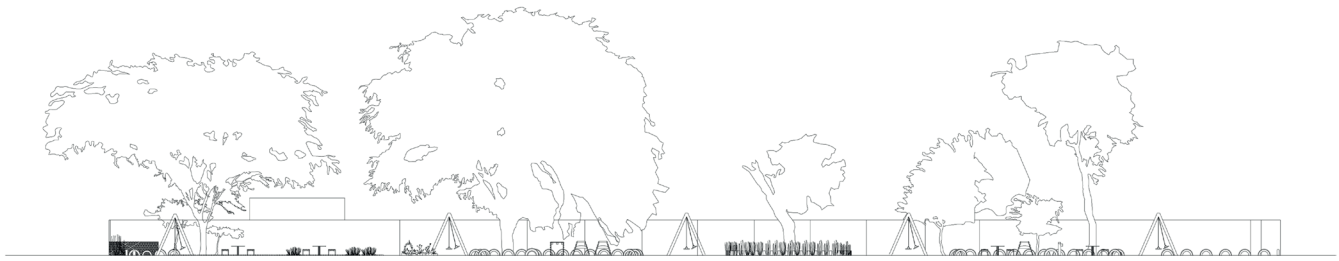
Figure 3. Longitudinal section of Santa Julia Park. Source: Made by the authors.
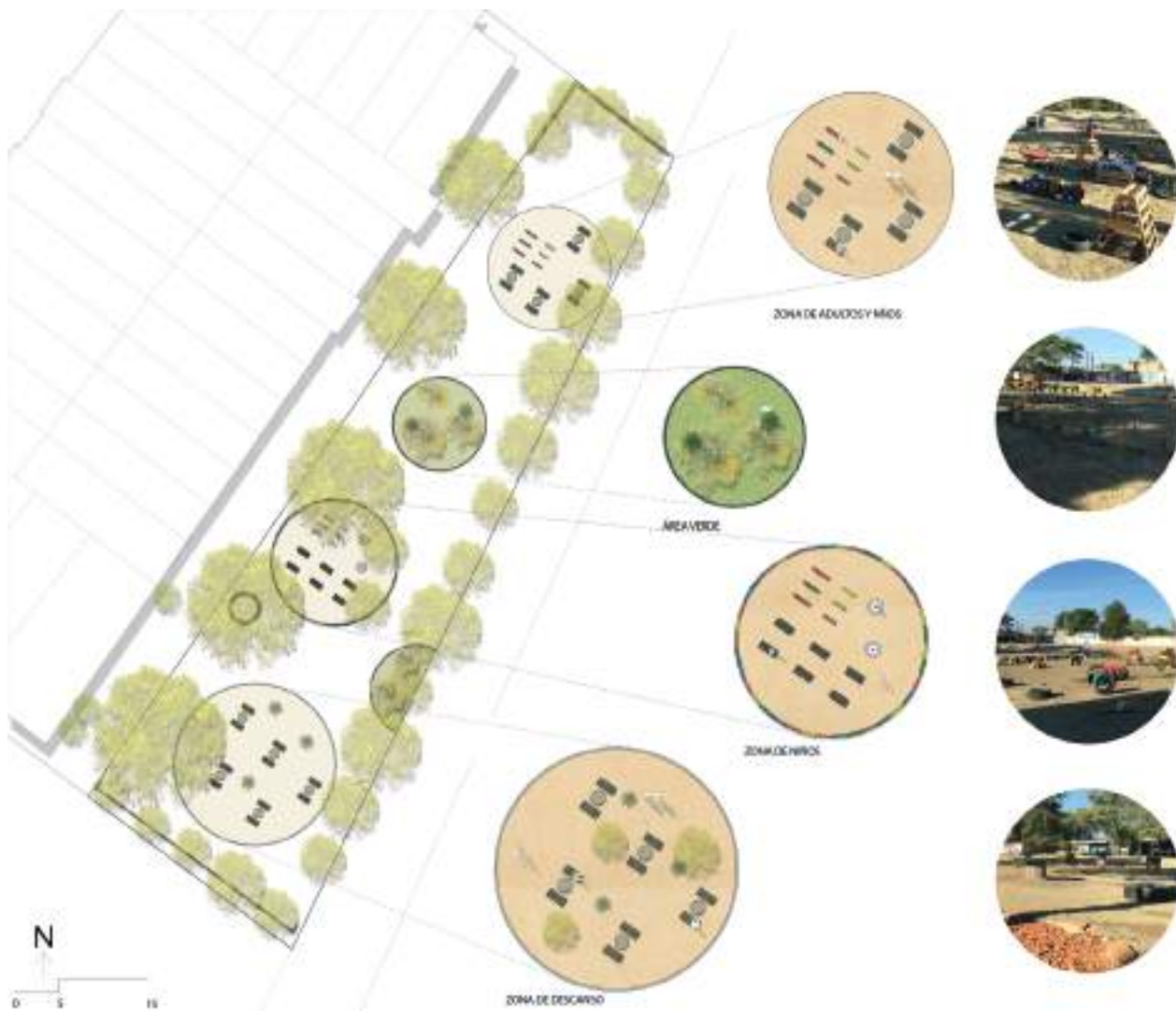

Figure 4. Drawing of the Santa Julia Park, made from the requirements of neighbors. Source: Made by the authors.

Figure 5. Part of the process of execution of Santa Julia Park. Source: Photography taken by the authors.

Figure 6. Activities carried out on Inauguration Day. Source: Photography taken by the authors.

The area of the land that is planned as a park has a total area of 2,100 m2. The land limits a street that, at the same time, has a drain function and connects the human settlement with the city center. The western side has a border with homes. Everyone has a direct access to it. On the ground, the community has the habit of depositing garbage and construction waste from the sector, generating bad odors and environmental and visual pollution.

The architectural design has been adapted to the current topographic configuration of the field. The execution of a park has been defined mainly for children. To accompany the areas with children's games, the neighbors established rest areas with benches and tables. The green areas serve as empty areas with adequate vegetation for the sector (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

The objectives for the execution of the park were related to: the involvement of the inhabitants in the design decision making process; the use of low-cost materials that would make future replicability feasible for the inhabitants and the sustainability of the intervention and the planning of a possible action to be carried out in the short term.

The first activity of the execution phase was a general cleaning of the place, then work was done on the construction of children's games, furniture and trees and plants were planted. This procedure included 6 weeks of work. Regarding the environmental and material criteria, the park was built largely with recyclable and sustainable materials such as bamboo, pallets and disused tires. The neighbors not only contributed with them but also with their workforce.

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Figure 7. Before and after. Source: Photography taken by the authors.

To get the materials, they organized several activities, such as collective lunches. Some materials as well as the plants were donated.

In all the steps we worked together with the neighbors and volunteers (Figure 5). As a pilot project, the park was inaugurated on July 1st, 2018 and it should work as an example for other human settlements in the area (Figure 6).

RESULTS

Placemaking work has continued long after the initial project has been installed. That is why the last stage consists of progressive monitoring, where surveys and diagnoses are carried out with the intention of verifying the degree of acceptance of the proposal, from which improvements are made in the park and with the objective to keep and increase the degree of community participation.

In the work with the neighbors, leaders and representatives of the Neighborhood Board, different tools were used, such as talks, social networks and workshops to sensitize the population on urban development issues, the importance of public space as well as simple ways to recover spaces. Informative talks for the population have been organized periodically and offered a space to present the concept and importance of public space. With the social networks, an online platform was made available. Volunteers and neighbors were invited to participate, who were informed about the progress of the project. The different participatory workshops worked directly with the local population to recognize local desires and needs. We tried to involve all

the neighbors so they feel identified with the project and at the same time, responsible for its maintenance. Figure 7 shows photographs before and after the intervention.

Through this intervention, the results are manifested in the moment people are interested in improving their parks, as they help raise awareness to other neighbors about the importance of public spaces in the city.

The neighbors report a constant use of the park, including children from other human settlements and nearby schools. An improvement in public life in the sector was achieved. The repercussions have been favorable and immediate, on the day of the inauguration of the park, the Chief of Police of the Citizen Security Team of the district, handed a logbook to the representative of the community, who promised to keep a daily surveillance in the sector. In addition, there was an approach by the company providing the public electricity service, to install lighting in the park.

In order to make a statement about the impact of the intervention and the improvement of quality and public life at the site, a survey was conducted with the users of the park four months after its inauguration. The collection of information was carried out on site and has been directed directly towards park users. The design of the survey content has considered that the space meets the criteria considered by Project for Public Spaces (2015) for a place to be successful: the meeting space, the uses or activities, the connections, access, comfort and image. In the case of evaluating if the place acts as an adequate meeting space, it was taken into account if it

[1]   Project for Public Spaces (PPS) es una organización estadounidense de planeamiento, diseño y organización educativa, sin fines de lucro, dedicada a ayudar a la gente a crear espacios públicos que fortalezcan comunidades.
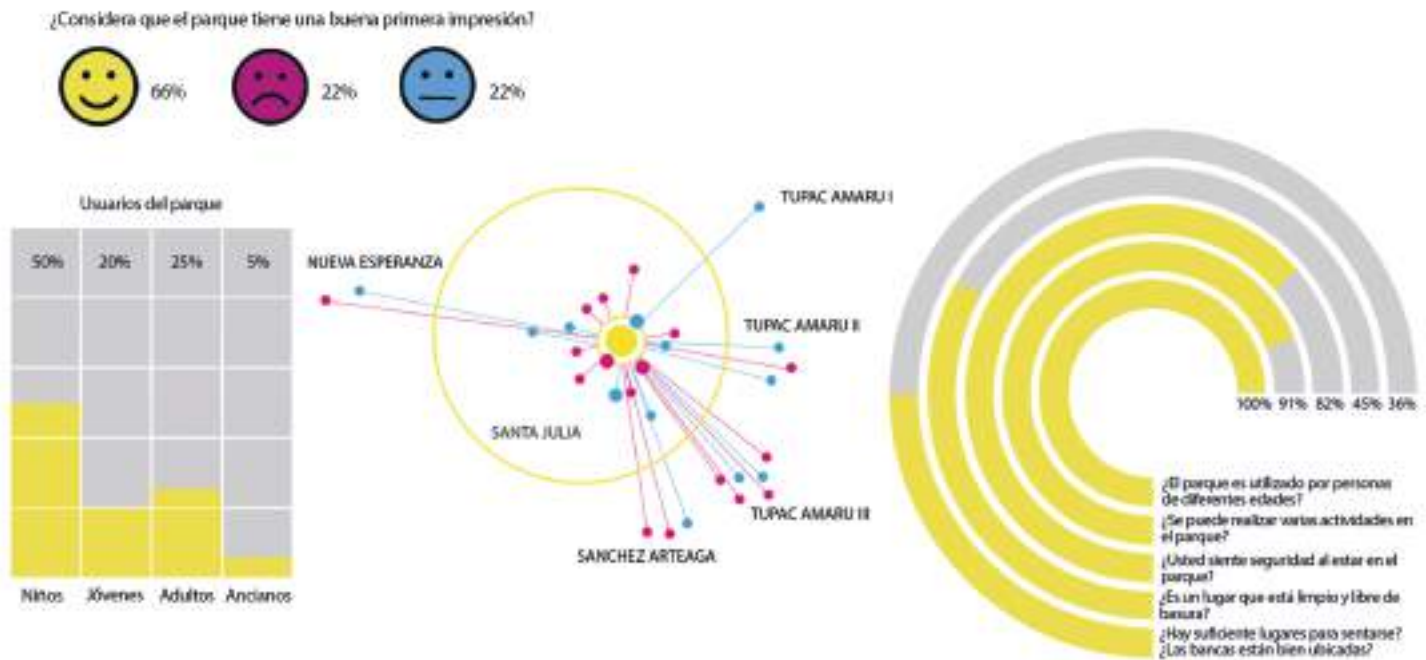
Figure 8. Results of surveys conducted two months after the inauguration. Source: Made by the authors.

is an interactive place, if there is a nighttime use, if there is diversity in users or if there is a sense of identity with the park. The questions in the questionnaire were also focused on the dynamism and active use of space. The perception of safety and cleanliness has been important aspect in the criterion of comfort and image. 30 users and residents of the park participated, including 40% who were children under 12 years old.

The results are generally positive (Figure 8). 66% of respondents believe the park has a good first impression. Only 22% are not satisfied with the visual impact of the place. This perception through the view is transcendental to contribute to the value of the human settlement and the city.

Generally the park is used by people of different ages and most confirm that the place offers several activities. Constant use has increased security and 82% of users interviewed say they feel such security when they are in the park.

According to the results, there is still a deficit in the cleanliness of the place. Recycling is a little encouraged habit in Piura, in addition to the fact that the location of the existing bins is poor, since they are hidden from the view of the users. Also, there are missing places and benches to sit. Children also claim more variety of games.

With regard to assessing the transformation of a space into a vibrant place with quality, which forms an identity; the Project for Public Spaces (2016), has identified 11 key points to follow as a guide. In this sense, the process of transforming the park in Santa Julia has followed the 11 rules of placemaking:

1_ The community is the expert: Throughout the process we have worked with the population at different levels of participation.
2_ A place is created, not a design: A place for children has been created, where they can play and spend their free time.
3_It is a team work: Partners have contributed with more resources, innovative ideas and new sources of energy: the FuturoPiura collective initiative, the population, the Santa Julia Neighborhood Board and the Citizen Security Service.
4_ In the execution process there have been many difficulties, but "It cannot be done" has never been said.
5_The best way to change a neighborhood is to observe what works and what does not work in that particular place: A diagnosis of the area and participatory workshops have been carried out, such as collective mapping.
6_ Develop a vision: For a community vision to make a difference, it must be created by the people who live there.
7_ The shape supports the function.
8_ A great place offers many things to do: There are activities for people of different ages and interests.
9_ Start with small things: It has started with a basic structure of the park, which can be improved in the future.

10_ Money is not the problem: Neighbors have organized activities to collect money. In addition, they have worked with economic materials, from the area and/or from recycling.

11_A place does not ever stop improving: Together with the neighbors, maintenance and monitoring are still ensured. It is necessary to expand the offer of games and create more shade for the summer months. Currently, materials are being searched for improvement and a pergola has been implemented with the intention of getting a little more shade.

Figure 9 shows the comparative and current results of the project, using as a basis the criteria of placemaking evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of a macro-level study we have observed that the neighborhood parks of Piura have problems to fulfill their purpose as public spaces, due to the dissociation between the required and built green areas and the expected parks. Most neighbors spend their free time at home; according to them, because there are no adequate and quality public places; however, the public space expresses the conditions of the city and plays a fundamental and transformative role.

Thus, through participatory workshops, we tried to directly support the design of neighborhood parks in
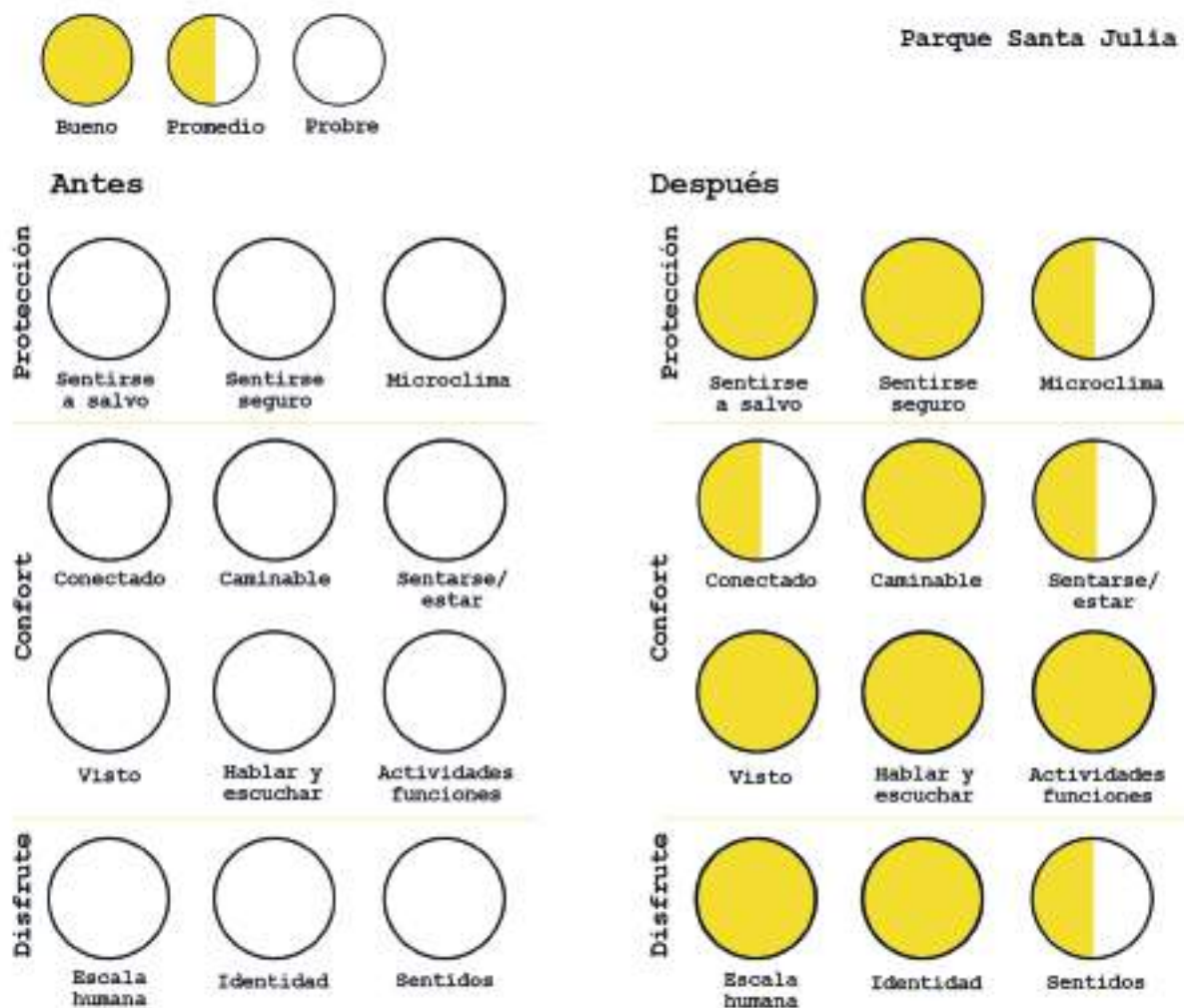

Figure 9. Comparative and current result of the project, using the criteria of placemaking evaluation as a basis. Source: Made by the authors.

Piura. An attempt was made to achieve participation at all levels (inform, integrate and include) throughout the process, identify uses and through the exercise of inclusion manage to transform a specific context appropriately.

The project implemented the placemaking methodology because it considered that the most effective way to improve the city is to influence the concern for reinventing public spaces, turning them into places based on the dreams and needs of the community. Following the thought of Whyte (1980), you can learn much more by observing and talking with people to understand their needs. In addition, it was taken into account that design is not the most important, but a component to reach the ultimate goal that is the creation of the place. Thus, in the specific work some basic principles were followed that include involving all interested parties, using visual and simple methods, avoiding formalization and being dynamic with the methods.

The project, from its social perspective, sought to establish an integration relationship through the different activities carried out in the process. The intervention, linked to the regeneration of public space, sought to achieve an internal network that worked to establish greater social cohesion, a feeling of identification and responsibility and set the pillars for a possible connection with the outside and a dialogue with the city. It was about breaking down the barriers between the population itself and the city. When developing a conscience in the social relations of the public space, a dynamic, unfinished and transformable project was thought.

The participation of the community has been a fundamental factor for the success of the project whose objective was to encourage the formal planning of the city and promote the integrated and participatory approach to greater sustainability, specifically in the design of public space, with the approach involving the population in all phases of the project. In the public space, the neighbors that make up a neighborhood are the main characters of the change. Citizen participation has operated as a fundamental axis; People's knowledge about places, challenges and opportunities was collected. There is the opinion that the best sustainability of the projects is achieved with an active and adequate participation and integration of the population in all stages of urban planning of their space, which led to a collective coexistence from before the park was inaugurated. In this framework, placemaking is linked to sustainable citizenship. It is driven by the process, to make places and their use a reality in order to announce change. Placemaking is

characterized by being a continuous work. This ensures sustainability with different events or trainings that are also organized after the project execution.

Creating places is everyone's job. Planners need to directly involve those who live in neighborhoods, and this commitment means establishing a moral relationship that from the beginning recognizes the right of people to the city. This project was designed taking into account the limitations of the inhabitants and families of the periphery of Piura, in addition to its socio-economic stratum and the social impact of the project's image. Some predominant materials of the area such as bamboo were used, as well as recycled materials that neighbors themselves were able to obtain. In a continuous process, neighbors can improve their park in a self-constructive way.

Finally, the park has demonstrated a fairly important objective in the debate on public space: a place for everyone.

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