

IMPACTS OF THE IMMIGRATION CORRIDOR ON PERUVIAN AND CHILEAN CITIES

URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

IMPACTOS DEL CORREDOR MIGRATORIO EN CIUDADES DE PERÚ Y CHILE
TRANSFORMACIONES URBANAS DURANTE LA PANDEMIA

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El desalojo de migrantes de la plaza Brasil, en la ciudad de Iquique, cuestionable por la violencia de la fuerza pública, dejó de manifiesto no solo el problema humanitario implicado, sino también un punto de inflexión en los intentos por normalizar un proceso donde las ciudades se han visto alteradas por el éxodo de migrantes. El presente estudio indaga en los impactos generados por las sucesivas etapas de migración correspondientes al flujo migratorio venezolano, el cual se caracteriza por una condición de gran vulnerabilidad. Desde inicios de 2020, en etapa de crisis sanitaria y cierre de fronteras, estos migrantes han ingresado por vía terrestre y por pasos no habilitados a Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, Bolivia y Chile, con el propósito de encontrar mejores condiciones de vida en los destinos prioritarios en este contexto. Se discuten aquí los enfoques que relacionan flujos y transformaciones como respuestas a factores de reproducción de la sociedad global, con aquellos que conciben la movilidad como una “fuerza creativa” que interactúa en forma autónoma con estas estructuras. Para ello, se explora la movilidad en los centros históricos de tres ciudades ubicadas en zonas de tránsito fronterizo y de ingreso a cada país, donde la interrelación en el espacio público se ha transformado y tensionado: Piura, en Perú, e Iquique y Antofagasta en Chile. Los resultados evidencian similitudes en dinámicas y transformaciones generadas. Dada la condición vulnerable de los migrantes, se observa un incremento en la ocupación del espacio público como resultado de acciones autónomas de autogestión y organización, como también de resistencia local, lo que da cuenta de la relevancia de la movilidad en la sociedad contemporánea. Se recomienda, en suma, adoptar una agenda diferenciada para comprender la conexión entre migrantes y lugares durante la experiencia de movilidad.

Palabras clave: migración, covid-19, espacios públicos, transformaciones urbanas.

The eviction of migrants from Plaza Brasil, in the city of Iquique, an act that was questioned due to the violence used by public forces, revealed not just the humanitarian problem involved, but also a turning point in attempts to normalize a process where cities have been altered by the exodus of migrants. This study looks into the impacts generated by the successive stages of migration within the Venezuelan migratory flow, one characterized by the great vulnerability of these migrants. Since the start of 2020, amid a health crisis and border closures, they have entered Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile by land using unauthorized crossings, to find better living conditions in these destinations. Here, the approaches which connect flows and transformations as responses to reproduction factors of global society, with those that conceive mobility as a “creative force” that interacts autonomously with these structures, are discussed. To this end, mobility in the historical centers of three cities located in border transit and entry zones to each country, where the interrelation in public space has been transformed and stressed, is explored, namely Piura, in Peru, and Iquique and Antofagasta in Chile. The results show similarities in the dynamics and transformations generated. Given the vulnerable condition of migrants, there is an increase in the occupation of public space, through autonomous actions of self-management and organization, as well as local resistance, demonstrating the relevance of mobility in modern society. All-in-all, it is recommended to adopt a differentiated agenda to understand the connection between migrants and places during the mobility experience.

Keywords: migration, covid-19, public spaces, urban transformations.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, the social, political, and economic crisis in Venezuela has caused the largest population exodus of the last two decades towards the south of the continent. Migratory movements have become a challenge, especially for recipient countries; a situation that has worsened amid the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing the health crisis, and requiring immediate responses from the affected governments. In this process, cities have played a substantial role, as crossroads, especially those located on the Pacific Ocean, where more than four million Venezuelans have made their way along the geographical corridor towards the tip of America.

Peru and Chile have been experiencing constant economic growth, as have Colombia and Ecuador, which alongside geographical continuity factors have made them attractive destinations for migrants. According to the Venezuelan Population Flow Monitoring in Peru, made by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2020), in February 2020, the Venezuelan population in transit indicated Peru as their main final destination (92.6%), followed by Chile (5.3%), Argentina (1.2%), and Bolivia (0.6%). In Peru, 860,000 Venezuelans have found refuge, and in Chile, 361,000 (Escobar, 2019); figures that consolidate their role as recipient countries of cross-border migration, and that force their cities to adapt.

The cities located on the migratory corridor, in border transit and entry zones to each country, on the route to the priority migration regions and cities, such as Lima and Santiago, are the main destination cities for migration. These play the role of receiving migrants and represent attractive employment options. In the northern region of Peru, service, agro-export, and extraction activities lead the economy, positioning themselves as a labor alternative for migrants. The cities of northern Chile are attractive to migrants due to mining, services, and trade in the Duty-Free Zone, the result of their ability to continue leading the economic dynamism. Thus, as border cities, Piura, in Peru, and Iquique and Antofagasta, in Chile, have a double role, of transit and of receiving migrants.

In this evolution, these cities have been transformed in terms of the occupation and reconfiguration of public space, integrating the migrant movements. From the growth of street trade and informal settlements in the outskirts, migrants contribute with new lifestyles and add a component of social unrest today. Above all, the lack of adequate responses from local governments, stresses the social reality of cities, especially for those

which this study addresses, exacerbating the extreme positions that question the arrival of migrants.

The prominence of space in the creation of the migrant mobility social reality and its articulation with the reproduction processes of global society (Santos, 2004; Canales, 2016; Maldonado, Martínez Pizarro, and Martínez, 2018), are under debate. On one hand, some find the movement, permanence, and resettlement of the migrant population, as responses to the dynamic transformation of contemporary society conditioned by capital, demography, class structure, and social inequality reproduction factors (Canales, 2013). On the other, some see this phenomenon as a “creative” force to address the basic needs of survival (Casas-Cortés, 2020). For Bojadzjev and Serhat (2010), this is an autonomous response of migration, in the configuration of mobility in space, which emerges from social conflicts, and leads to rethinking the approaches to analyze the South American migration route.

In this context, the purpose of this research is to contribute to debates on relationships between space and its users, examining the interrelation between migrants and public space through their daily use in the historic center of the three South American cities. It seeks to understand the specificities of the relationship between this group of users and the public space, identifying survival tactics as well as those of resistance and organization, and comparing the urban dynamics and transformations in the heart of the three cities.

Based on theoretical discussions on the precariousness of temporary migration and the intersection between migrants and urban space, the proposal of the work seeks to expand upon the reflection on the incidence of migration dynamics in the reconfiguration of cities, which presupposes, in a globalized world, pondering the migrant as an active driver of urban restructuring (Bork-Huffer, 2009). *et al.*, 2014; Maldonado *et al.*, 2018).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Migration is built in a complex, multi-variable scenario, exacerbated by the health crisis that exceeds humanitarian borders in a framework that the process of globalization grants. To date, several investigations address the effects of migration processes and how they, as socio-spatial dynamics, have marked the development of cities, the use of public space, urban expansion processes, policies, and the local economy (Etzold, 2019). Likewise, some evaluate the global dimension of the territorial transformations that are affecting



Figure 1. Venezuelan migration corridor. Source: Preparation by the authors.

South American countries, as responses to global society reproduction factors (Santos; 2004; Canales, 2013; 2016; Maldonado, 2018).

In the context of the political and socio-economic crisis in Venezuela, added to the health emergency and migratory restrictions imposed by South American governments, the movements of the Venezuelan migratory flow found permeable points on the borders of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. This allowed shaping the migration corridor (Figure 1), as a concrete experience enhanced by the geographical continuity and the experiences that pioneer migrants shared through social networks, which allow understanding systemic relations and their connections, encouraging the population exodus, and increasing the number of people entering irregularly or informally.

Initially, on a South American scale, the economic and social crisis in Venezuela and Colombia (during the early 2000s) triggered migration to Peru and Chile, which positioned themselves as receiving countries for migrants (IOM, 2020). On a national scale, as part of the geographical migratory corridor, Peru and Chile are both transit countries and recipients of migratory flows, and, on a local scale, their strategic cities are a crossroads.

The proposal of Datta and Brickell (2011) falls within the scope of city space transformation. It allows observing and interacting with the different migrant dynamics and reveals an understanding of the broadly and spatially complex mobility, regarding the modification and adaptation processes of places, of a groundedness during those interactions. The translocal approach embodies not only studying local-global relations but, at the same time, local dynamics. The urban transformations as trans-local reconfigurations, resulting from those social practices, which create and transform shapes (Santos, 1996), and as significant ways that materialize human existence, where there is no human being who does not rise within a world of humanized materialities (Silveira, 2014), constitute statements that simultaneously allow recovering and unveiling the social totality, in other words, the space as a whole.

In this framework, the public spaces as stages for dispute, and the complex and conflicting encounters of different actors, show the various forms of appropriation of an active citizenry (García-Arias and Hernández-Pilgarín, 2019) and, in parallel, can play a key role in improving migrant inclusion by acting as places for dialog and intercultural exchange (Price and Chacko, 2012). Likewise, Kohn (2004) identifies three components of public space: ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity. He relates property to public goods; accessibility to the possibility of entry to all inhabitants; and intersubjectivity to the social aspect and the promotion of communication and interaction. The study of public space gains depth by adopting a more people-centered approach and its fundamental role in the social and economic life of communities. In this sense, Borja and Muxí (2003), Johnson and Glover (2013), and Wittmer (2017) have realized their importance in the city. It should be added that there are different land uses in the city and public space has the role of linking them, creating places for recreation, exchanging products, or creating symbolic landmarks (Carrión 2007).

In general, it is acknowledged that space is produced, endowed with meaning by its inhabitants and users, and is the product of complex power relations (Lefebvre, 2013; de Certeau, 1999). Just as with the concept of "appropriation", this is a result of the creative action of citizens expressed in the city space, those who are brought together and converge in its production. The design and the proposed roles of public space are, according to Lefebvre (2013), representations of space that reflect "decisions about what - and who - should be visible and what should not, [when talking about] concepts of order and disorder" (Zukin, 1995). This duality between the uses of space, in the decision-making process, and the user or users as active creators of space,

generates the question: who really is the user and how do they appropriate the space?

By the beginning of 2021, the measures adopted by the region's countries sought to control the spread of the pandemic. With the declaration of a health emergency, restrictions on freedom of movement increased, and with the closure of borders, a ban on the entry of non-resident foreigners was decreed. The lockdown rulings, the crisis in hospital care, and compulsory vaccination generated a differentiated impact on the different population groups, hitting the population with limited resources and precarious and informal jobs harder. In this way, the mass arrival of migrants alongside a major part of the local population, which had to leave their homes and neighborhoods to support their families, led to different subsistence and appropriation strategies of the public space.

III. METHODOLOGY

Given the breadth of the migratory phenomenon, this research sought to design a work methodology that would address the dynamic complexity of occupation of urban space – and its restrictions - in the chosen cities. Thus, the first decision of the team was the choice of urban centers, where the first plane of reflection went through understanding the particularities of each city, their economic activities, demographic and location aspects, among others, contextualizing Venezuelan mobility in its transit along the migratory corridor. In this way, the approach from geography, architecture, and anthropology is formed by a multidimensional vision that favors analysis of the migratory phenomenon and its interaction in the public space. Specifically, the spatial dimension – the transit through places and territories – was one of the objectives to be addressed. Hence, an observation strategy was chosen, but from a perspective that allowed dialog from a multilocalized strategy (Rivero, 2017). It sought to privilege observing movements in those points that, during the pandemic, remained a constant reference of migrant occupation, which became a space to share access to resources, accommodation, and information regarding the next stages of their "journey".

A descriptive methodology and a qualitative approach were chosen for the research approach, (Flick, 2012), characterized by capturing and reconstructing meanings (Ruiz, 2012), since they helped expand upon the analyzed scale, comprising the movement of individuals in the context of the historical centers. Its application was based on using an observation pattern and its purpose was to identify the spatial movement of migrants in the public

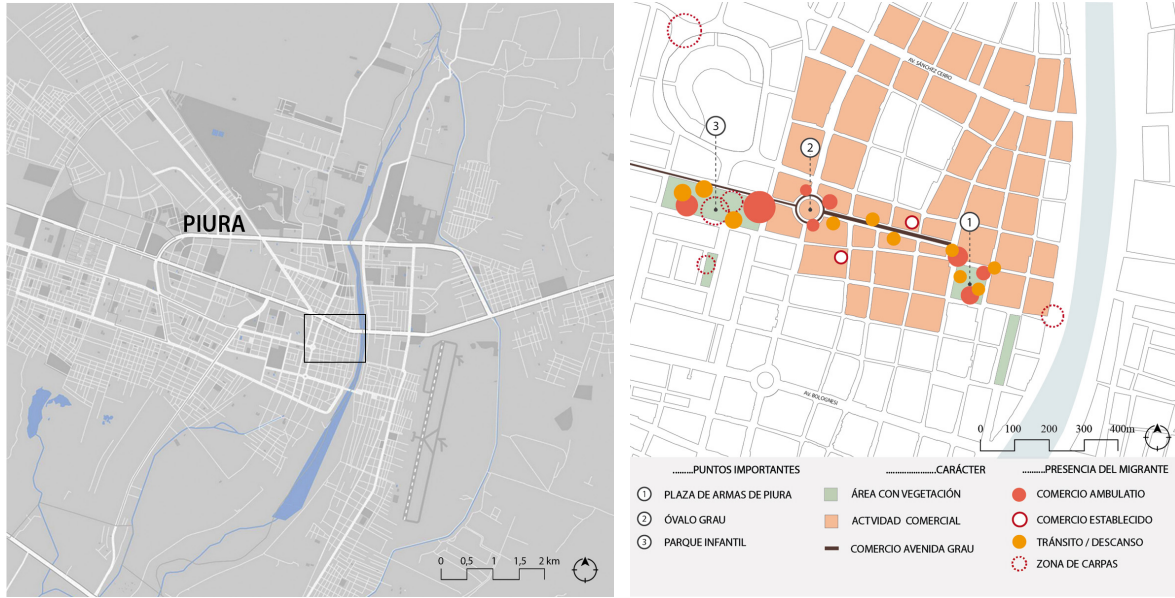
space, in a pandemic context and the resulting tensions regarding the use and access to services in that space. The record was complemented with photographs, given the importance of visual data (Banks, 2010), and with the elaboration of sketches based on flow maps of people's movement around the different streets of the city, which allowed reconstructing the plans included in the next section. Finally, the fieldwork was completed with open and brief conversations that, in many cases, emerged during the observation in a quick and the least invasive way possible so as not to greatly affect the vulnerability of migrants and their complex conditions.

IV. RESULTS

The dual role of cities as a stop-off and migratory corridor effectively became a constant, where migrant practices were reproduced in different places. Through the observations made in each city, it was possible to identify several forms of occupation. The constructivist perspective, by providing analysis of the characteristics of flows and paths in the public space, helped to understand the displacement dynamics, giving meaning to the occupation of urban centers in the specific context of the pandemic and allowing, not just to discuss the particularities and generalities of the phenomenon in the three cities, but also to develop possibilities to expand upon and for the continuity of the study.

Regarding migrant visibility in the space of the three cities, a new dynamic generated by migrants, and an increase in associated economic activities can be noticed. Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the mapping of the Venezuelan community's activities against the commercial activities of the center and its public spaces.

The city of Piura (Figure 2), is the fifth-largest city in the country, with about 480,000 inhabitants (National Institute of Statistics and Informatics [INEI], 2018). Due to its border location, it is the destination for migrants passing through the border with Ecuador and is the transit zone to other southern regions of the country. The city experienced exponential growth driven by invasions or illegal land markets. In addition, it is estimated that 90% of the population works in the informal sector, many in services and construction (INEI, 2018). In the urban structure of the historic center, the Plaza de Armas (1) and Grau Avenue and Oval (2) stand out, where there is a noticeable presence of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, with a greater concentration on Grau Avenue, one of the city's main avenues. In its first blocks, this stands out as being an important commercial



Figur3 2. The historic center of Piura and urban displacement of migrants. Source: Prepared by Angie Calle.

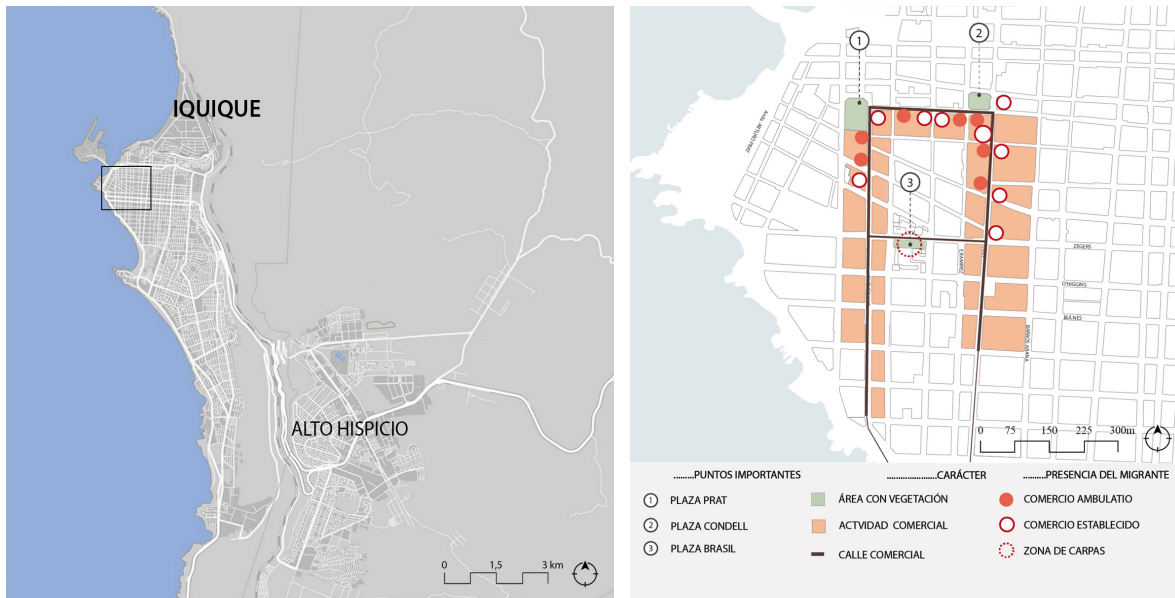


Figure 3. The historic center of Iquique and urban displacement of migrants. Source: Preparation by the authors.

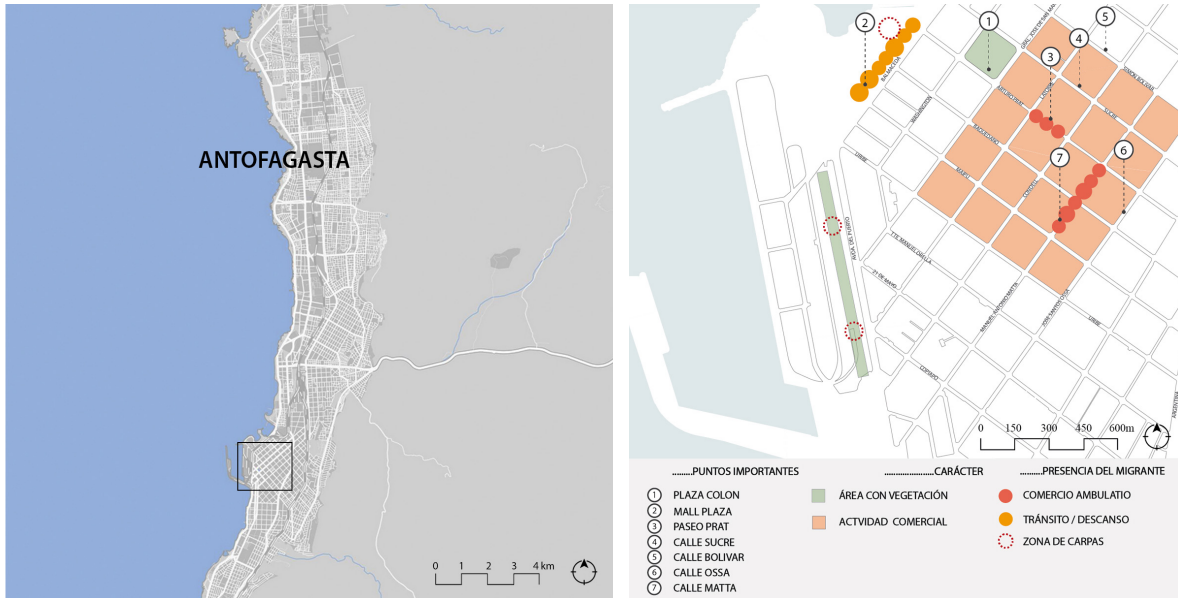


Figure 4. The historic center of Antofagasta and urban displacement of migrants. Source: Preparation by the authors.

intersection that is confirmed in the pedestrian flow, the shops, and some traditional places.

The city of Iquique and Alto Hospicio form a conurbation whose total population, according to the 2017 census, is 300,000. Iquique extends along a narrow coastal platform and its center (Figure 3) was historically configured by its relationship with the port and its activities. The arrival of groups of Venezuelans in 2020 marked a humanitarian turning point. Migrant families, enduring extreme climatic conditions, crossed the border at more than 4,000 meters above sea level, from the high planes of Bolivia and Chile, and descended towards Iquique, crossing the desert to reach the city. The historic center became a reference point to receive them. There are three squares in the historic center's urban structure, which give an order to the city: the main square, Plaza Prat (1), with its financial and social activities, and heritage buildings of the Municipal Theater, cafes, and clubs; Plaza Condell (2), with commercial activities that extend into the surrounding streets; and, finally, Plaza Brasil (3), linked with the neighborhood urban unit that welcomed former migrants who gave it its name, "Barrio Inglés" or the "English Neighborhood".

Meanwhile, the city of Antofagasta has been a center of cosmopolitan attraction since its foundation. With

an eminently mining origin, it was known for attracting workers and families from different corners of the world. Nowadays, with a population of over 360,000 inhabitants, according to the 2017 Census, it is the region with the highest number of copper deposits in the country, and their exploitation, in turn, has had an important effect on the urban dynamics of the region and attracts new inhabitants in a search for work. It is one of the cities with the largest migrant population in northern Chile. In the urban structure of the historic center, Paseo Prat (3) and Matta Street (7) stand out, one of the main arteries of the city, which is located near the Mall (2) (Figure 4) and has the largest flow of migrants.

Three occupation and transformation categories were observed in the three centers. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate some of the dynamics observed in the historic center of the cities of Piura and Antofagasta. The first category corresponds to formal trade, referring to established trade, and has an association with migrants linked to their vocation and identity practices. In the three cities, a new dynamic can be seen, through an increase in economic activities, with migrant-managed barbershops, services, clothing sales, and fast food joints. Through the stores, social networks are created and other businesses are established. In Piura, the formal trade of the Venezuelan migratory group is a new phenomenon over the last



Figure 5. The dynamics seen in the historic center of the city of Piura. Left: Grau Avenue Galleries. Center: Grau Avenue. Right: Children's Playground. Source: Photographs of the authors and *El Comercio* (2018).



Figure 6. Photographs of the dynamics observed in the historic center of the city of Antofagasta. Left: Arturo Prat pedestrian promenade. Center: Zone occupied on Balmaceda Ave. cycle path, in front of Antofagasta Mall. Right: "Puro Colombia" Bakery, on Ossa Street. Source: Photographs of the authors.

five years and has intensified with the pandemic. In the two Chilean cities, but especially in Antofagasta, the first migratory wave of Colombians dates back to the 2010s, and the presence of migrants in the historical centers is common, as such it is not so easy to identify Venezuelans. In practice, they add to a participatory and integrative synergy (Massó Guijarro, 2013) associated with informal street economic activity. In the case of Iquique, the number of migrant-managed shops has increased considerably in recent years, with the arrival of the first migrants from Venezuela, alternating between street markets or strip malls.

Informal street trade is a widespread phenomenon in the three cities analyzed, something that is perceived in

a polarized way. The merchants are found in the busiest streets of the center, although in the afternoon/evening they move to spaces outside the malls or parks. Street vendors and food stalls in the streets are part of the commercial activity that gives open spaces a special character, beyond the productive work and the social connection they generate. Among the most symbolic aspects of consumption, territorial appropriation was found, where the explicit cultural expressions of migrants, associated with open spaces, such as music, food, and drink, can be considered activities of attachment to the place. They are the same sellers who come every day occupying the same places. They indicate that there is a certain organization between them and everyone knows each other. Despite the mobility restrictions of the pandemic, a high number of street vendors are seen



Figure 7. Dynamics observed in Plaza Brasil in Iquique. Source: Photograph of the authors.

in the main streets of the center. In Piura, this mostly happens on Grau Avenue and its oval (2). In Iquique, commercial activities were concentrated on Tarapacá and Vivar streets, where informality predominates occupying the streets, and the presence of Venezuelan migrants is a minority. In Antofagasta, the largest concentration of informal trade is located on Matta Street (7), specifically in places with a greater influx of public, due to the control by the police.

Finally, the camp-type temporary forms of occupation, through tents and awnings, have emerged in the public space of the three historical centers, in squares, vacant lots, and green and recreational areas, as well as in beach areas. In Piura, places such as the Children's Playground (3) or the green areas in the Los Cocos Development are occupied with tents as overnight spaces. In Antofagasta, due to the lack of space in green areas in the center, the temporary occupation has moved to the interstitial area between the Institutional and Commercial Center and the port area, and the Antofagasta Mall (2). Before the mass-scale arrival of Venezuelan migrants, it was used as a temporary settlement for the "homeless" population. Currently, there is a visible occupation in these spaces, mainly during the day. Thanks to the information gathered, it can be stated that migrant family tents are installed during the night, especially in areas around the port, since during the day these spaces have surveillance

that makes it difficult to maintain a permanent setup. While in Piura and Antofagasta the occupation has a very temporary character, in Iquique there is an appropriation of the space for a longer period, where the appropriated migrant tent area is concentrated in Plaza Brasil (Figure 7).

As a special case, the occupation of Plaza Brasil acquired a particular character due to its outcome: the violent eviction at the end of September by the police. The occupation began in September 2020 and remained active and uninterrupted as a camp for a year. The temporary appropriation evidenced a dynamic of self-management and resistance as a means of pressure to obtain a response from the central government and achieve its migration projects. The form of appropriation was characterized by the organization and planning of the square's space, into areas for families and single men, by the setup of their tents and the distribution of cooking spaces, shared dining areas, and awnings for toilets and showers. The process continued with the zoning by uses and activities, differentiated by the needs of family groups and/or single men. The appropriation was accepted by the neighbors initially when the humanitarian nature prevailed and the presence of children and women marked the process. An action, in keeping with a city that identifies itself as multicultural since its founding, where it is normal to live among migrants, with ethnic and socio-cultural diversities. However, while awaiting a response

from the government, criticism and discriminatory comments were on the rise, which ended up triggering an extremely violent outcome.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this research allow demonstrating the effects of migration on the spatial dimension of the three cities under study, identifying the local survival tactics employed. A spatial dynamic linked to the migrants and the ways of occupying urban space can be observed. The context, practices, and ways in which it is used to meet needs vary and are related to individual cases and circumstances. More so in Peru, a country that is known for its high rates of informality, and in the cities of the north of Chile, where these forms of employment are not new, or different from those that took place before the arrival of refugees and migrants from Venezuela.

The findings obtained should be evaluated with caution due to some methodological limitations that could compromise their external validity. In this sense, it is worth mentioning a transversal difficulty present during the pandemic: both the restrictions on the mobility of people, as well as the dimension, scope, and speed of the Venezuelan migratory process, complicated collecting information, given the impossibility of keeping permanent contact with migrants.

On the other hand, migrants, depending on their socioeconomic status and origin, but also the specific migration policies of the recipient countries, were conditioned to varying degrees, included or excluded from accessing urban institutions, infrastructures, and services. Some created and/or expanded informal spaces to secure a livelihood, housing, or education (Roy and ALSayyad, 2004). In the case of the occupation of urban spaces with tents, specifically in Iquique, the arrival of migrants poses a challenge to the established state regulation and the political systems of the receiving countries. As Bork-Huffer et al. (2014) argue, the situation of being a migrant denies opportunities to make long-term plans and decisions for work and life, since one remains in improvised, fragile, and temporary conditions. The visibility of human practice through the daily use of a massive group of migrants highlights the importance and meaning of its representation. "The very act of representing one's group [...] before a wider audience creates a space for representation" (Mitchell, 2003), and such is the case of the three centers.

However, by adapting to the urban environment, migrants are transforming urban spaces according to

their needs, options, and restrictions. This is the case with migrant street vendors who, in the three cities, create new flexible and fluid informal spaces that fulfill fundamental social, cultural, and economic functions (Etzold, Keck, Bohle, and Zingel, 2009). Public spaces are hotbeds of public order and the activities of vendors often provoke a response from security personnel and local vendors (Bork-Huffer et al, 2014). Corroborating the prominence that the public space acquires, urban areas have a deep ambivalence, since, for many, they are both places of hope and opportunities as well as places of conflict and survival. This ambivalence shapes the interactions and negotiation of urban public spaces. From this perspective, the study shows similarities and particularities in each of the three cities, in the spatial and temporal patterns of use, as well as in the actions of local resistance to a vulnerable migrant, manifested in attempts to normalize a reality.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this work was to contribute to debates on relationships between space and its users, examining the interrelation between migrants and the public space through their daily use in the historic centers of three South American cities: Piura, in Peru; Iquique and Antofagasta, in Chile. The presence of migration in the urban landscape contributes to questioning the use and meanings given to urban spaces. In this sense, progress was made towards understanding the specificities of the relationship between this group of users and the public space.

To conclude, it should be noted that in this study, integration is conceived as a matter of relational equality, therefore, it should promote more egalitarian relationships between people, where social networks have become very important. However, equality does not necessarily indicate integration as a situation where social boundaries are overcome. In addition, people may identify with different local or transnational groups, and personal affiliation may be stronger than national ones.

Urban citizens coexist, react, and contribute to the dynamics of urban spaces. The receiving and transit cities have been transformed through transitory dynamics, where the location of migrants has been changing over time in each city, taking the respective transnational practices with it. In this context of internal mobility, a process of adaptation, integration, and resistance is generated, which gives rise to

socio-cultural transformations, that, in turn, will create new relationships between migrants and locals.

The findings of this study have significant implications for understanding urban processes, contributing to the debate on dynamism in cities. Starting from the basis that public spaces promote communication, it can be argued that this potential to reconnect all parties can create new forms of coexistence, allowing social mixing, citizen participation, and a sense of belonging. There is a clear need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics in the urban space of our cities regarding migratory flows, even more so with the emergence of protests with anti-migrant and xenophobic attitudes. However, these survival tactics, as well as those of resistance and organization, can stimulate and support urban innovation, increasing the competitiveness of cities and, ultimately, contributing to their economic development.

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