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DINÂMICAS URBANAS INTERGERACIONAIS: TERRITORIALIDADE E COVID-19

INTERGENERATIONAL URBAN DYNAMICS: TERRITORIALITY AND COVID-19 THAIS LIBARDONI, LÍGIA CHIARELLI



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#### **Abstract**

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic requires safe and inclusive cities to reestablish community cohesion and intergenerational contact, both weakened by social distancing. Urban spaces, which are a source of social relations for young people and older adults, lose heterogeneity in this process due to differential access. Seeking to propose design guidelines for intergenerational spaces potentially adaptable to the pandemic context in Latin America, an analysis of the action of territorial elements in the permeability of age micro-territories was carried out. A case study conducted behavioral mapping in areas of group appropriation and rejection, resulting in recommendations on visual contact, distinctive ambiances, temporal layers, potential use, flow/permanence separation, and diversity of activities. Such recommendations in the Latin American context aim at endogenous processes of intervention, supported by urban theory and praxis. They explore the attractive potential of territories in intergenerational urban dynamics while following guidelines necessary for social distancing. It stands out that territories must be considered altogether, in a context that is fragmented by age specificities, but connected and permeable by intergenerational similarities. This scenario requires greater coordination of actions in Latin

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American countries, promoting physical and visual connections in urban fragmented structures.

**Keywords:** Latin America, Urban Dynamics, Covid-19 pandemic, Environment-behavior relationships, Age territories

#### 1 Introduction

The year 2020 has propelled the discussion about healthy cities. The urgency to stop the pandemic of the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus compelled social distancing measures in order to avoid the contact of individuals with asymptomatic infected people. Consequently, the access to public spaces, great attractors for intergenerational coexistence, was restricted. Regardless of an apparent contradiction between public life and the establishment of social distancing, these spaces are crucial for diminishing the harmful impacts of the pandemic on mental health (Moulay and Daouia, 2020).

The demand involves a comprehensive concept of healthy and safe but also humanized and inclusive cities (Gehl, 2015). However, due to its capacity to bring strangers together, people perceive public spaces fearing insecurity (Low and Smart, 2020). The emerging question concerns the preservation of accessibility to social spaces and its adaptation to different conditions of social proximity. Moreover, this problem is more complex in places where segregation is consolidated through historical processes and prevails a specific territorial rigidity derived from modernism and common in Latin America (Maricato, 2000).

Latin American studies about differential access to the city consider socio-economic conditions but ignore behavioral issues when it comes to the physical distribution of social groups (Frehse, 2016). In addition to socio-economic asymmetries, different age groups face unequal conditions of access to and appropriation of the city (O'Sullivan, Mulgan, and Vasconcelos, 2010). This disturbing fact is especially true in Africa and Latin America, where an accelerated aging process is modifying the demographic profile (WHO, 2019). The World Health Organization states that life is currently longer and healthier, but acknowledges that the pandemic may change this scenario (WHO, 2020).

Covid-19 exposes and amplifies generational inequalities (Burke, 2020), impairing social integration in several age arrangements. Intergenerational relationships mitigate ageism (O'Sullivan, Mulgan, and Vasconcelos, 2010), which has critically increased with the pandemic (BBC News, 2020). In the opposite direction to what is advocated by the evolution of the concept of aging, the older people, as a risk-group for Covid-19, were once again associated with fragility and dependency, distorting the heterogeneity of this age group. Prejudice strengthens with the tendency of occupation of health units for a longer time by seniors, thus contributing to the lack of vacancies in intensive care (Moraes et al., 2020). Moreover, Burke (2020), director of United for All Ages in the United Kingdom, warns that social distancing can limit opportunities for intergenerational contact.

In the resumption of community cohesion, intergenerationality passes through the user-environment relationship, producing urban vitality and deconstructing negative reputations that places acquire due to tension between young and older people (Holland et al., 2007). A strong age division interferes in both perception and behavior, producing differences of access and between groups. Young and older people are vulnerable and need to be stimulated to social integration for different reasons: young people do not identify themselves with spaces designed for children or adults and are often exposed to criminality (Layne, 2009), so their groups are related to disorder and insecurity, whereas older people may have difficulties in urban appropriation and be prone to loneliness (O'Sullivan, Mulgan and Vasconcelos, 2010), now intensified by the pandemic (Burke, 2020).

The impacts of Covid-19 are asymmetric, evidencing differential vulnerabilities (Harvey, 2020). It is necessary to recover urban space for young and older people, but the environmental influence in their coexistence is scarcely investigated. The research that originated this article applied a perceptive comparison methodology (Layne, 2009) in a case study with behavioral analysis. Groups constituted age micro-territories, i.e., social appropriations with territorial attributes and identity related to users' peculiarities (Libardoni, 2018).

In micro-territories, physical features, uses, and meanings match their identities with users' identities, promoting social behavior. Territoriality is temporary and changes in size, form, and nature, adapting to individuals and groups (Ascher, 2010). Its permeability also reflects the personal space: users with a fragile identity may wish for less contact and territoriality increases such perception (Sack, 1983). Therefore, permeability is both physical and subjective and interferes in the coexistence of territories and intergenerational dynamics.

The original research provided subsidies for intergenerational urban projects, through attributes, features, and characteristics that are inviting for young and older people (Libardoni, 2018). This paper aims to produce design guidelines for intergenerational spaces, potentially adaptable to the pandemic context and sensitive to the Latin American scenario, from an analysis of the action of territorial elements in the permeability in appropriations by the youth and the older people.

# 2 Urban sociability in the Latin American context: young and older people

Sustainable urban modernization answers to social dynamics, providing cities with a capacity of following the complexity of society (Ascher, 2010). Reflection is present all along the intervention process, privileging negotiation, diversity, and historical, economic, and social contexts that oriented the production of urban space. This contextualization avoids importing concepts from other realities, which is common in Latin America, where the distance between theory and practice creates imposed interventions without any adaptation to local realities and territory fragmentation (Valencia, 2013).

When disregarding local reality, traditional uses, meanings built through appropriations (Filgueiras, 2008), and sense of place are weakened. Fragmentation occurs due to the lack of connection between urban spaces and isolated interventions. Disconnected urban structures stem from truculent processes of territorial negotiation and prioritization of cars to stipulate scales and flows (Álvarez and Ferreira, 2016). Such dispersion, associated with unqualified social spaces (Couret, 2015), changes lifestyles and the heterogeneity of coexistence (Filgueiras, 2008), aggravating inequalities and differential access to the city.

Physical and symbolic separations in urban structure abash certain social segments (Ribeiro, 2004), thus harming social cohesion and community integration, especially for the older people, who have urban spaces as their primary source of social contact, whether active or passive (Libardoni, 2018). With retirement, older people lose their image as active and have their social circle reduced. These individual losses add to collective ones that arise from profound arbitrary spatial changes and affect their identity, which is as sensitive as the one of young people (Papalia and Feldman, 2013).

Young people are building their identity, permeated by the spatialization of urban segregation. Their territorial behavior demarcates limits for several Latin American "urban tribes", with musical, sportive, "artivistic" – such as graffiti, that brings up the presence of the excluded (Scardino, 2017) –, and political identities, like student movements, anti-system movements – such as *rolezinhos*, meetings of large groups from the outskirts of the city in elite spaces –, and movements related to crime. They produce transgressive appropriation of spaces that are not supportive of their needs (Rodríguez, 2016).

The instability that involves the youth and the great social inequalities in Latin urban centers have aggravated the feeling of insecurity, impairing their relationships with older people. Despite that, the intergenerational hypothesis suggests a pursuit for a comparable quality of life, due to stages of development with similar needs: young people search to develop physical, psychological, and social skills, and older people search to maintain these skills (Layne, 2009). Such likeness points to the urban relevance for those groups and corroborates the idea that projects may attend age dyads by considering their similarities and particularities.

### 3 Urban sociability in appropriations: territories

Appropriations give meaning and identity to space, and then it becomes a place (Relph, 2009) where dynamic behavioral patterns follow spatial and human factors, establishing arrangements, personal distances, and flows (Sack, 1981, apud Sack, 1983). When addressing flow and permanence, it is imperative to consider the reconfiguration of the person-environment relationships through the mobility restrictions imposed by Covid-19 in and out of the territories (Devine-Wright et al., 2020). Attending to new dynamics, strategies to adapt to safe social parameters have appeared.

Territories are adaptable and overlap temporal layers of appropriation, which leave traces into one another, modulating relationships of appropriation, rejection, segregation, or integration. Relationships are vertical when one group has differential access (Sack, 1983); or horizontal, when there is a balanced coexistence (Alexander et al., 1977). Despite the peculiarities, some common features to territories (Haesbaert and Limonad, 2007) base the analysis of the study:

- Symbolism: values and identities shared by a group that supports its cohesion;
- Level of openness: borders can be permeable and connected or closed;

- Continuity: connections among fragments are mediated by social relationships and enhance the territory;
  - Temporality: changes along time, permanent, cyclic or circumstantial;
  - Instability: ease of recomposing borders, decreasing or increasing accessibility;
  - Intercrossing: capacity of relating to or inserting oneself in other territories;
  - Scales: coverage level.

# 4 Methodology

We have carried out a case study in Pelotas in Southern Brazil. The city counted 328,275 inhabitants in 2010, of which 16.6% were young people (from 15 to 24 years old) and 15.2% were elderly people (from 60 years old on) (IBGE, 2010). The city characteristics are common to Latin American cities with Portuguese and Spanish colonization. These spatial features and socio-economic inequalities permeate their main urban problems nowadays. In Pelotas, some places prioritize functionality and consumption, to the detriment of user experience (Couret, 2015), producing dissatisfaction that is portrayed in Latin studies (Páramo et al., 2018). Activities are divided according to age and do not consider all ages (Rodríguez, 2016). Urban fragmentation increases differential accessibility.

With a qualitative-quantitative character and supported by Environmental Psychology, the research was concluded in 2018. Literature and documental research have based physical survey and behavioral mapping, a systematic observation (Sanoff, 1991) that described activities in four typologies in the historical center, area with municipal coverage, and daily circulation of people of heterogeneous socio-economic profiles (Figure 1). There were carried twelve observations for each typology, on weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, at 9.30 AM, 11.30 AM, 3.30 PM, and 5.30 PM. Normal conditions of use, before the Covid-19 pandemic, allowed to map natural behaviors of young and older people that can be stimulated or adapted under sanitary warning, for a comparison of scenarios further on.

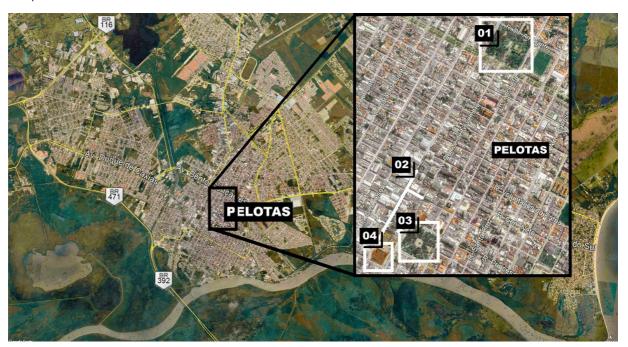


Fig. 1: (1) D. Antonio Zattera Park, (2) Pedestrian mall, (3) Cel. Pedro Osorio Square, (4) Largo of the Public Market. Source:

Google Earth map with annotations by the authors.

## 5 Urban dynamics from the behavior of young and older people

The following analysis only considers the appropriation typologies of the young public, which proved to be the majority in one of the areas of the square, and of the older public, which was equally representative in one sector of the pedestrian mall. This delimitation allowed to identify behavior patterns of appropriation and rejection.

### 5.1 Square

With radial configuration, its paths converge to a fountain, concentrating flows and delimitating green areas. The researchers observed 2,084 users and the youth dynamic generated appropriation in area 2 and rejection in area 8 (Figure 2).

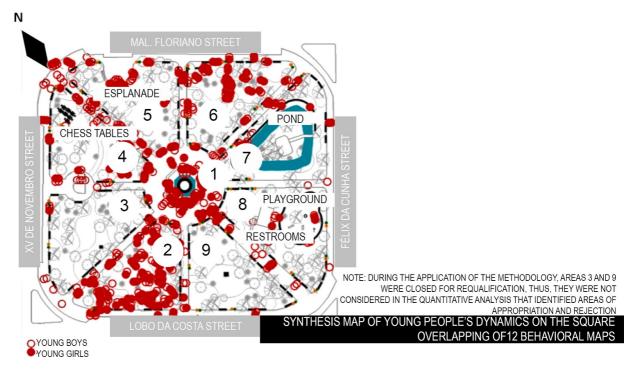


Fig. 2: Youth dynamic in the square. Source: the authors, 2021.

### 5.1.1 Youth micro-territory

Sector 2 is a flowerbed area in which occupation by the youth represents 44% of the total. A curb and benches delimit the borders, providing rigidity of limits in this space. There are two main ambiences: (i) central – spacious, open, sunny, with grass and low vegetation; and (ii) peripheral – with sparse grass and shade trees that do not prevent the view of the surroundings and the fountain.

Groups of young people preferred the central area and the privacy, next to the low vegetation. The search for socialization and privacy is intense in the youth (Holland et al., 2007). Young people were self-centered and focused on their activities (Andrade, 2010), appreciating potential, informal and protective spaces that are center-oriented. Older people and intergenerational groups privilege formal occupation and externality and even place chairs in the periphery of the space, to observe the young ones. The configuration increases spatial divide, representing an interesting pattern of spontaneous intergenerational occupation (Figure 3) and accentuating passive integration of those with reduced social circles through external attractiveness of social territories.



**Fig. 3**: Intergenerational groups and older people observe the young in their territory (on the right). Source: the authors, 2017.

Ambiences fragment the territory in personal and social scale. Even without formally offering activities, potentiality instigates personalization, led by groups who search for egalitarian access to the city (Scardino, 2017). Several unpredicted activities (e.g., slackline, picnics, frisbee...) result in a cyclic use that expands the variety of users along the day, providing rhythm and territorial intercrossing. Despite the different youth identities, it was easy to notice the harmony between groups, during intensive use. Appropriation carries a subversion potential (Lefebvre, 1991) and a transgression meaning (Shaw and Hudson, 2009) for movements that, if linked to sports such as skate and slackline, require supportive and safe spaces, reducing risks of clandestine practices, common in Latin-American countries (Rodríguez, 2016).

This kind of appropriation of this area is recent, driven by the fluctuating university population that has grown in size and heterogeneity with the new systems of access to higher education. In this appropriation, university students from different origins mingle with local groups. The multiplicity of identities of the area and of its users complement each other, composing a Latin American contemporary urban scenario of diversity, in which social appropriations by the youth are crossed by discontinuities, in a "plasticity" that allows to gather diverse cultural worlds together (Martin-Barbero, 2006).

### 5.1.2 Area of rejection by young people

Area 8 has similar limits to area 2, but occupation by young people is only 10% of the total. It is shaded, there is not any grass nor low vegetation, thus configuring fragmentation, but does not offer any privacy or personal scale. Space division in restrooms and playground prevents from seeing the fountain and the rest of the square, isolating it from other age territories (Figure 4). Visual access to other stations of age activities is a strategy used in intergenerational parks like the *Bomboli*, in Ecuador.



**Fig. 4**: The playground, isolated from the rest of the square. Source: the authors, 2016.

A few young people were sitting on the swings or on the bench that surrounds the playground. Some older people in the periphery were observing the activities in the center, suggesting an external attractiveness reduced by the lack of visual access. The playful meaning of the playground has been lost to functionality: the standardized equipment was producing invariable behavior, thus limiting creativity and the cyclic variation of uses. The stationary character of the equipment also reduced the intercrossing of groups, evidencing territorial rigidity. There is a traditional temporality that disregards contemporary unexpected solutions that attract several ages, like the *Parque de los Pies Descalzos* in Colombia, that mixes pedagogical and children's themes of the sand park with the tranquility of a zen garden and the privacy of the bamboo grove.

# 5.2 Pedestrian mall

A "T" formation connects two linear sections of the pedestrian mall, with a fountain marking their intersection. In this typology, flow and permanence mingle. An observation of 3,348 users and of the dynamics of older people showed appropriation in area 8 and rejection in area 5 (Figure 5).

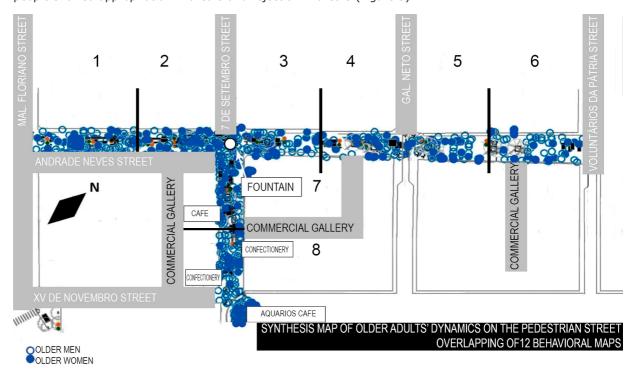


Fig. 5: Dynamic of older people on the pedestrian mall. Source: the authors, 2021.

#### 5.2.1 Older people micro-territory

With an occupation of 47.7% of the total by older people, sector 8 differs from other areas of the pedestrian mall because (i) it concentrates traditional cafés and candy shops, which extend sociability to public space through external tables, while in other sectors clothes stores predominate; (ii) there is less flow and more permanence; (iii) it is a functional appendix of the of the busiest pedestrian street, integrated to it through visual access to the fountain. Older people were standing up in simultaneous social groups in the peripheries (Figure 6), in front of the candy shops and of Aquarios Café, a traditional meeting point for men that consolidates the appropriation of the surroundings for a long time.



Fig. 6: Older people socialize standing up. Source: the authors, 2017.

External activities allow to share territorial functions and changes of ambiences, not in a personal scale, but in a social one. Groups were remarkably close during intensive use of the area, creating territorial intercrossing and overlays and, due to the flow, little rigidity, as borders merge with the space, through the contact increased by circulation. Occupation configures cyclic changes more related to users than to activities.

The central arrangement of the benches and the vegetation, that provides shade without delimiting, harm privacy. Maybe because of this, permanence of the youth was not expressive. The meeting of current and traditional constitutes a playful identity. Traditional ambience is maintained by the configuration of the space (cafés); by the permanence of socialization habits; and by older people wearing traditional clothes, which is typical of cafés (Holland et. al, 2007). This way, the area falls within a temporality strongly marked by other times, typical of historical centers with great sociability (Andrade and Baptista, 2015), but the lack of support to several levels of privacy and spatial formality (or informality) may be limiting the potential of coexistence of the age dyad.

### 5.2.2 Area of rejection by the older people

With older people representing only 13.6% of the occupation, the area 5 has: (i) appliance stores; (ii) less flow; and (iii) the status of "end of the pedestrian mall" – without any visual access to the fountain or to crowded areas. Most people were circulating, reinforcing the passage meaning: the linear configuration, the repetition of elements and the lack of amenities make it difficult to fragment the area into social ambiences (Figure 7). The shops produce an attraction that results from planning and functional flow and does not incite permanence (Bernardino et al., 2004). These unqualified and generic public spaces, dedicated to consumption, are very common in the Latin American reality (Couret, 2015). As a result, there is spaced cyclical use, eventual socialization, groups that are distant among themselves and rare intercrossing. Older people socialize standing up, in the periphery, but many were alone, due to the weak social character of the area.



Fig. 7: Area 5 favors functional flow. Source: the authors, 2016.

### 6 Micro-territories of age appropriation: territorial system

Territorial system (Haesbaert and Limonad, 2007) has shown peculiarities in the age micro-territories, according to the analysis of the areas:

**Identity:** young people have shown interest in transgression and rejected functionality. Functional spaces and fixed equipment hardly bear with potentiality and a playful use like the one the pedestrian mall has for the older people. The playful meaning of the older people micro-territory also contrasts with the functional character of their rejection area;

**Integration:** coexistence of social groups in simultaneous activities. In the study, visual access between territories and with other spaces within the typology has strengthened the connection network, promoting integration and continuity. The older people have taken place in the peripheries of the areas, in order to observe activities in the center, demonstrating passive integration and a predisposition to approximate to the youth territory;

**Fragmentation:** ambiences reduce the scale in users' perception, attracting diversity. In the square, as opposed to the pedestrian mall, arrangements allow desirable social compositions with privacy and personalization, in a heterogeneous mosaic of small homogeneities (Alexander et al., 1977). This way, it is difficult for one group to dominate the other, whether by size or distinction.

**Temporal insertion:** territories have divergent temporalities, but environments may accommodate a diachronic geodiversity of patterns, either visible or not (Fernandes, 2012). Daily uses and elements create emotional attachments (Dimenstein, 2014) that attenuate side effects of the interventions in community identity.

**Cyclic diversification:** a permeable cyclic accommodation occurred through spatial compatibilization of flexible and complex ambiences, which allows interchanges of uses and activities and expands the compatibility criteria (Bourdieu, 1996, apud Netto, 2014) among distinct social actors. In the young and potential area, use cycles were short, attending people with different intents and promoting territorial overlays. When only one activity prevailed, repetition weakened potentiality and diversity.

**Territorial rigidity:** tension over territorial limits decreased in places with great flow, tending to diminish in the presence of other users. However, a certain rigidity brings sustainability to the territory. The separation of flow and permanence is relevant when users demand more privacy and control, which happens with young people.

**External attraction:** limits divide territories but are also contact zones that can favor intercrossing. Cyclic diversification of activities brought up a tendency of attracting people that are external to the territory, to observe. It is relevant in the case of the older people, who have shown interest in observing other territories.

**Scale:** typologies have municipal coverage, attracting users from distant areas, but their ambiences decrease the scale to a social level, in arrangements for specific social needs. In the square, scale achieves a personal level, there is some privacy (on the contrary of the pedestrian mall), and that can be an advantage for the use by young people.

Next session addresses such peculiarities of age territories as strategies of adaptation to the current context.

### 7 Covid-19: a comparison of scenarios

This study showed the attractivity of green areas regarding generational diversity with an intent of permanence. With the pandemic, parks and squares had their use and age diversity intensified. However, as successful social spaces, they decrease attention to distancing guidelines (Gehl, 2020). To respond to that, strategies of Tactical Urbanism, with low cost, easy implementation, and concern with local characteristics, have been implemented in Latin America.

The strategy of spatial organization into ambiences encourages distancing in potential green areas. Esthetically pleasant delimitations, like vegetation, stand out, as well as those that are playful and attractive to all generations, such as *Mi Casa, Your Casa*, in Mexico, in which structures of activities arranged in a grid (Designboom, 2020) aim at passive community integration while respecting social distancing. Passive interaction started to be stimulated in the pandemic (Salama, 2020), through visual continuity in meeting points, increasing their external attractiveness (Moulay and Daouia, 2020). The strategy of expansion separates flow and permanence, favoring distancing and privacy in places where those were not possible before. Buenos Aires enlarged sidewalks and Cordoba reorganized streets, creating new areas for cyclists, pedestrians, and permanence (ITDP, 2020).

Nevertheless, the pandemic exposed the inequality of access to green areas in Latin American cities. In Sao Paulo, for example, some neighborhoods have 30 times more trees than others (Queiroz, 2021). Urban fragmentation makes it harder to implement mobility strategies like the 15-minute city and requires interventions at different levels. The creation of informal spaces for the diversification of activities and community integration in the pandemic is the solution presented in *Ferramentas de Esquina*, in Florianópolis (Brazil), a construction manual for street furniture, like individual benches, toys and distancing delimiters for vulnerable territories like slums and indigenous lands; and also in *Coordenada 0*, in Ecuador, an adaptable equipment for social, economic, community, education and environmental activities (BID, 2021).

# 8 Conclusion

The micro-territories studied herein have shown potentializing and limiting factors of age permeability. From them, it was possible to elaborate the following guidelines for intergenerational spaces:

**Visual access between territories**: territorial integration through passive interaction may explore the differential importance of this practice for older people;

**Diversity of ambiences:** to propose an arrangement of environmental stimuli that provides opportunities for variety of appropriations;

**Potential uses:** transgressions accommodate unexpected uses that escape from planning, adapting traditional places to contemporaneity and to the heterogeneity of social groups. Spatial potentiality can be stimulated from behavioral studies in a given area;

**Vertical accommodation of temporal layers:** changes in urban space throughout time adapt it to contemporary needs, using modern resources, but elements that mark other temporal layers for groups like the older people must be maintained. Familiarization with the meanings acquired through appropriation by vulnerable groups minimizes losses from resignification interventions.

**Flow/permanence separation:** separating flow and permanence creates escape zones with different levels of privacy and space control, respecting a variety of needs. The "t" configuration in flow typologies like the pedestrian mall pointed to a potential to slow down, but that must be strengthened with amenities;

**Diversity of activities**: it stimulates the use by diverse groups and external attraction, that is, people from outside of the territory may be more attracted to observe multiple activities.

To address age micro-territories with intergenerational focus may seem contradictory, but these places of identity are attractors within the intergenerational dynamics, preserving urban vitality during and after the pandemic. Territories allow occupations according to social distancing guidelines; however, they must be considered as a whole, in a context as fragmented by age specificities as connected and permeable by intergenerational affinities. In this process, the recommendations are relevant for the Latin American context. To ensure visual access between territories, acknowledging them as an integrated system, as well as diversity of activities, promotes passive intergenerational interaction and community cohesion within safe distancing parameters. In addition to that, visual openness allows control over undesired approximations.

With a diversity of ambiances, the designer organizes potential uses, using cognitive strategies that suggest safe occupation, through pleasant delimiters like vegetation and playful elements, attractive to intergenerationality. To reduce the scale at personal and social levels is relevant in cities planned for cars, which are common in Latin America. The flow/permanence organization creates escape zones, distancing, and areas that are inviting for walks, linking disconnected attractor spaces. The accommodation of temporal layers makes contemporary possibilities and what is traditional and consolidated compatible, respecting the sense of place and minimizing the pandemic hostility. Also, it rejects solutions imported from other realities that pasteurize the urban tissue and erase traces of previous layers.

These guidelines aim at an endogenous intervention process, based on theory and urban praxis, considering different levels of operation. In the Latin American context, many strategies for formal cities do not apply to informal cities. In this sense, solutions of Tactical Urbanism allow immediate adaptations and exploratory actions, which may generate and follow structural long-term actions. The scenario requires greater global coordination of actions in Latin American countries, promoting physical and visual connections, and good age functioning, together, in fragmented urban structures. Latin American diversity produces successful appropriations that guide cohesive and connected interventions, respecting the irreplaceable local characteristics. The participation of every social agent, especially the divergent ones, such as young and older people, has a particular potential of leading to more democratic urban scenarios and egalitarian access.

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