

URBAN LOUNGE

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Explore Lab 32
Thesis Report

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THE RECOVERY OF SOCIAL-SPATIAL COHESION

REFLECTION

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Explore Lab focuses on the personal fascination of each student, allowing them to pursue a specific topic for research, and further develop a design responding to their findings. Far more than personal attachment to the city I was born and raised, the common study of public spaces and its relation to human behaviour is a topic that I've always felt passion for, yet never had the opportunity to delve into. I immediately felt there was a connection to the way the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia is constantly responding to growth and urban development over the years, and particularly how its historic centre (Casco Viejo) is being affected in response. Explore Lab was therefore the opportunity to further study this connection and come up with a hypothesis that could address issues of abandonment and decay in an area with great patrimonial value as is the Casco Viejo.

The problem of studying a city was that it is such a huge entity that it required a multitude of points of view. It is a physical place, yes, so it could be approached from geography, where a multitude of people of diverse origins (sociology) coexist, with a temporal (history) and artistic (architecture) extension – to name just a few. Urbanism, for example, led me to understanding issues with politics; researching about previous technologies and traditional materials led me to the study of innovation and

smart cities; and learning about the economy was a constant analysis as it is a factor that keeps changing depending on crisis. These various disciplines were adequate to focus on the city, yet they encompassed a large portion of information that was incredibly unmanageable for my thesis project. However, at the same time, all of them by themselves, fall short. Consequently, the real challenge was limiting my results during the research phase because even when I started to narrow down data, additional studies were needed to be addressed (or readdressed). Therefore, I think it is important to highlight that the outcomes of my research were not driven in a linear way. Instead, it became a constant process of narrowing and expanding information back and forth, interchanging from question to result and the other way around. Yet this process created a research cycle that eventually led toward a conscious, integrated, and restorative design scheme.

Part One of my report introduces the theme, elaborating on the problem, question, hypothesis, and research aim which gives meaning and identity to the project. Many thoughts evolved along the way - both my hypothesis and research aim changed in response to further findings; and as a result, I now understand that *change* is also part of the research itself.

Part Two develops and reviews my hypothesis based on previous literature, which became a dialogue of contemporary debates and theories concerning public space. I elaborated on key terms, the concept of public spaces, issues surrounding the historic context of the Casco Viejo, and the complexity of its management. Within this literature review, I realized that too often scholarly discourse refers to public space in black and white terms, when in reality the perception of public space is far more complex and nuance.

Part Three is based on methods of observation, mapping, and discussion. This field research became an experience of recollecting, remembering, and comparing information, which enabled me to perceive and understand: the dialects of permanence and change, culture and time, and practices and behaviours. Even though Covid-19 could have limited my performance during my field research, I believe I still came along a successful ethnographic study based on different patterns of user's everyday life and practices. Furthermore, giving a deeper understanding of established relationships within my research, I had different discussions with users and experts on the topic. The aim was to give people a voice in the research itself. Looking back at my methodology approach, I am convinced that I chose

the most suitable methods for my study since they allowed me to get into proximity with users and expand my knowledge on unknown topics during interviews with experts.

Part Four reflects on research conclusions and arrive at a design proposal that suggests a new classification of urban space, defined as urban voids. Even though this was merely the conclusion of my research, additional studies and technicalities of specific urban voids needed to be re-addressed even after the research phase concluded. Furthermore, this chapter comprises all gathered data and findings discussed so far which drives the conclusions made based on the context and program that will be addressed in the design phase.

Part Five is the starting point of my design concept, which focuses on transforming urban voids into urban lounges. This chapter was essential for the translation of research conclusions to design since it evolved into an Urban Strategy that divided broad objectives into more feasible phases. This was of immense guide toward identifying an object for design (anchor project). To make sure to get all required data before moving forward, I completed an extra field research phase to have more information on the building of Los Huerfanos to handle it as the architectural case for my design.

Finally, Part Six reveals the final design of Los Huerfanos, the anchor project of the Urban Strategy. The chapter evolves from information on the existing building, followed by the design development step-by-step process, program and structure, and ending with drawings and realistic impressions of the project proposal.

So far, the entire process of my thesis has demonstrated myself my own unconscious ability to draw conclusions from a much wider constituency, and to relate with sensitivity and responsiveness to current challenges in the Casco Viejo. That being said, I believe my project reflects a well round cycle of research translated to a design proposal and further plan of action.

To conclude, Explore Lab also gives students the opportunity to arrange their own team of mentors focussed on research, architecture, and building technology. Each with their own speciality, knowledge, and experience were of immense support for my project to exceed even my own expectations. I am greatly satisfied with the feedback and support I received from my tutors, not only concerning my project but considering as well difficult family circumstances that occur right after my P2, which made the completion of my thesis way more challenging to handle than anticipated. I must say that their support and understanding of the

situation was the necessary motivation for me to continue my thesis.

This entire journey has not just led me to receive a masters degree, but it has taught me way more than what this degree could ever represent. I have come to realize the many obstacles that were presented along the way, being family health circumstances or even inconveniences and issues with my first assigned BT mentor. And I am conscious that being able to continue after every fall proves our human capability to cope with problems (being personally and professionally) and has made me stronger in all aspects.

Therefore, I consider this project has the potential to not only demonstrate my skills and knowledge as an architect, but it has become living prove of the type of professional I aspire to be: perseverant when presented with obstacles, optimistic when circumstances change, relentless upon difficult situations. In one word, resilient.

After too many stressful situations that I was subjected to face during this year (particularly during these past few months), I must express how grateful I am for the support of those who encouraged me through the hard times. And how deeply proud I feel for the work I've come to accomplish, and the tenacity that brought me this far.



**URBANO
LOUNGE**