Chapter 1:
PEOPLE ORIENTED CITIES

1. People Oriented Cities

In the last decade we have seen a steady growth in the importance of developing the urban realm not only to satisfy its citizens' spatial and infrastructural needs, but also to highlight their involvement in the transformation of public space and thus in the improvement of quality for individual space.

Although this is not a new trend for some cities like Copenhagen and a great many cities in Europe, other less developed countries have found this democratization of space a useful tool for combating insecurity and promoting equality between its citizens. It seems everywhere these new concepts are applied the individual experience of a city is improved and societies thrive whether it is by making streets more accessible, developing public space networks or enhancing community interaction. In some countries like Denmark, and specifically in the city of Copenhagen, the focus on creating spaces that are friendly on the human scale has been key to the city's design process for several decades. In the country's capital, implementing a complex and functional public transportation system, giving priority to pedestrian and bicycle traffic and promoting interesting walking streets have been key elements in urban development.

These democratic principles of space have not only been beneficial for highly developed nations. In other less–developed countries, such as Colombia, even with its harsher environment due to staggering levels of violence, this type of design process has grown alongside community participation programs that emphasize the people's voice in the formation of their urban context. Such is the case of EDU *(Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano)* a real estate company that concentrate their work on urban

development in Medellin, Colombia. For about twenty years this company has worked alongside the government to renovate and rescue the most precarious city areas and it has achieved these transformations by incorporating design ideas from community members and building spaces they actually need and are willing to use. Another important aspect of the Colombian initiative in urban development is their focus on creating a network of projects with a sense of continuity within the city and, at the same time, provides citizens with an understanding of their city as an integral space and not segregated areas.

In the United States, there are also cases of decaying sections of cities, such as downtown Las Vegas where homelessness, infrastructural neglect and the nation's financial decline have taken their toll on the area. However, these communities will not have to wait for government funding and improvement due to the involvement of creative entrepreneurs and private enterprises that have decided to promote community development fueled and financed by their own companies. Another American example is that of the eroding downtown of what used to be one of the nation's most important cities: Detroit. The extreme economic dependance of Detroit on a single industry was evident after the crash of the auto industry. The city — with a population of almost two million by the 1950's — has been abandoned and now houses around 700,000 citizens in a crumbling infrastructural mess. However, in the past couple of years, the city has received a lot of interest due to its newly-found energy and revitalization, and its citizens are completing the majority of the improvements by renovating public areas, building community parking lots and transforming empty lots into vegetable gardens. (Okrent, 2009)

The Strip, historic downtown. Las Vegas, USA (Picture by Brian Finke, New York Times, 2012)

Aerial view of the historic downtown. Las Vegas, USA (Picture by Brian Finke, New York Times, 2012)

Historic downtown. City of
Detroit, USA.
(Picture by Yves Marchand and
Romain Meffre, Time Magazine
2010)

Decaying sites in Detroit, USA.
(Picture by Sean Hemmerle,
Time Magazine 2010)

In Mexico, where the predominant financing for urban development is a partnership between the government and the private sector, designing on a human scale has been a goal – albeit not the predominant one – for increasing infrastructure in the nation's capital and other cities such as Oaxaca, Guadalajara and Puebla. However, this does not mean that the government has a decisive say on how the city is shaped or transformed. This task usually falls to the private sector, and realtors and the government's primary role is to facilitate construction.

One example of private sector involvement is in Oaxaca where there has been a very active organization that has broken ground with new spaces

for the historic downtown and other sites around the city. The Alfredo Harp Helú Foundation Oaxaca *(FAHHO)* recently invested in dozens of projects with the aim of providing Oaxacan citizens with proper places to enjoy culture, from a children's library to the restoration of ancient religious relics. This foundation has decided to give the city a new and healthier outlook based on citizen's social and cultural growth. Mauricio Rocha, one of the architects in charge of the remodeling of San Pablo – one of the oldest convents in Mexico – affirmed that this shows how the civil community of Oaxaca is transforming their city by inserting cultural centers in rescued historic houses, thus creating more dignified spaces. (Santos, 2012)

Academic and Cultural Center San Pablo. Oaxaca, Mexico. (Picture by Ramirez, 2013)

Another example of how community organizations have made a difference in transforming their city is that of Guadalajara, the second largest city in Mexico, it has recently been suffering from problems similar to those of the capital: need for high-density living, uncontrolled urban growth, housing deficiency, increasing traffic and soaring pollution rates. Two years ago, Guadalajara held the tenth annual international conference for Carfree Cities and, with the help of the local organizations *"Ciudad Para Todos"* (City for Everyone) and *"GDL en Bici"* (Guadalajara On Bike), began discussions on how to make this city sustainable in the next five to ten years. Eric Britton, the activist who started these conferences, declared that "the time to move towards car-free cities has come. We must depart from cities that neglect us towards cities that belong to us. We need to collectively realize that in order to have a better future we need not to build more roads, but to transform our mindsets. It's time to move on." (2011) He is positive that Guadalajara not only is on the right track, but the city is taking pertinent measures to ensure a prominent future.

Historic center, *Plaza Hospicio Cabañas.* Guadalajara, Mexico. (Picture by Roman, 2012)

A prime example of government managing large projects and benefitting its citizens is that of the state of Puebla. In order to commemorate the city's 150th anniversary of the Cinco de Mayo Battle – an important Mexican celebration – the government decided to rescue the area of the forts where the battle was fought. This area had been neglected for years and was a very dangerous spot where drug sales and vandalism were frequent and common. With the assistance and collaboration of several local architecture firms, they were able to restore the main civic plaza and build five new public plazas. These spaces have served to diminish violence and insecurity by giving a main role in the maintenance of the area to the citizens. Authorities say that the idea is to have an open park that families can enjoy and neighbors will take care.

Los Fuertes, *Plaza de la Concordia.* Puebla, Mexico. (Picture by Audirac. 2013)

The case of San Andrés Cholula, located in the state of Puebla, has been one of a slow advancement towards this emerging movement in architecture that includes the citizens input for growth in the urban realm.

All of these projects and proposals provide a glimpse into how the current global stratagem is changing and what the focus for urban development will be in the next decades: giving cities back to the people.. When people have a greater input into how their surroundings are transformed, and when the human scale experience is taken into account is when we benefit from the aforementioned projects.

When a city is contemplated from a bird's eye perspective the panoramic vision and lack of audible perception result in an undefined city. While this view allows a better understanding of the city as a whole it can not detail all the complexity of a city that is lived and experienced by its people. From this panoramic perspective everything is perceived except detail and all that escapes that spectrum is replaced by the imagination and sometimes idealized, including the city's organization, land use assignment, and road mappage, but these are not necessarily a reflection of people's personal experience of the city.

The city, viewed from the human scale perspective changes and detail is not only visible but crucial to the surroundings. Here everyone is a participant that recognizes, enjoys, listens, and feels the city. The pedestrian knows the city from within and gives the urban realm its meaning. At street level, the city is no longer a unit but, instead, a tapestry of their lives which includes an infinite number of relationships, situations, emotions and memories. The city is the stage for interaction. (Dominguez, p. 15) Consequently, it is here where we must develop a plan to address answers to the population's spatial needs.

1.1. Developing cities for the human scale

Current global population growth indicates that 75 percent of the world's population will be living in cities by 2050 (Hejne, 2011). This fact has detonated an increasing concern in the field of architecture, as well as disciplines ranging from politics and business to social studies and ecology, that focus on the democratization of cities by improving public space, the development of better quality and more affordable housing, street accessibility and the enhancement of public transport systems. These improvements are all based on the same principle: the human scale is the most important aspect of design because it improves the quality of life for citizens. Therefore, a city's experience must be developed so that all citizens receive the same optimal quality of urban life.

In order to instigate these reforms to any extent, it is important to begin by re-thinking the importance given to the individual's experience of space in the city. In the past, most urban developers placed more importance on attaining order by sectioning city space. In contrast, the human scale method inverts the current scheme and gives priority to individuals.

In his graphic novel, "Citizens of No Place" (2012), one of Jimenez Lai's characters decides to evaluate space through the human eye perspective and compare it to how developers, architects and urban designers usually detail space on a two dimensional plane, stating that "[T] he vertical projections that produce plans and maps are not perceptible by the human eye [...] Because of our relationship with the ground – and gravity – the horizontal projection produces a visual immediacy" (p. 90). The

character later goes on to elaborate a comparison chart between the eye level and aerial view affirming that, "[...] the evaluation of quality literally depends on your point of view" (p. 100).
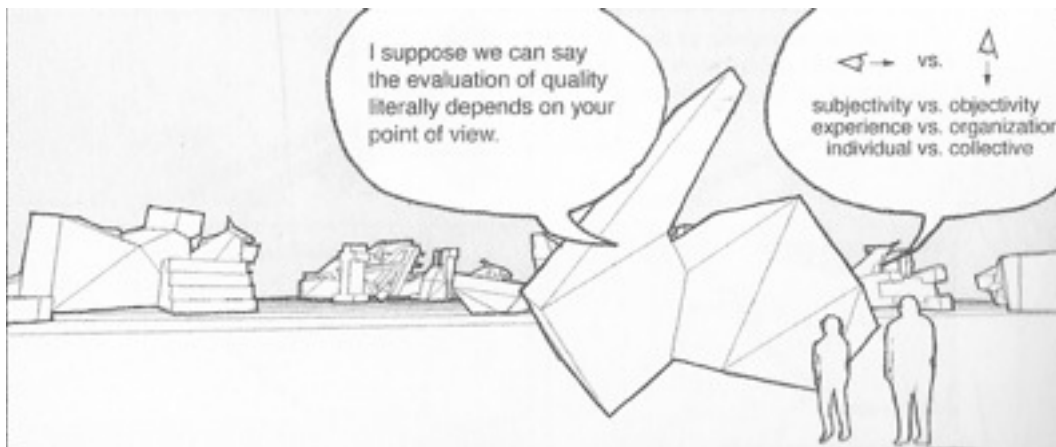
Citizens of No Place. (Jimenez Lai, p. 100, 2012)

It is at this vantage point, at the human scale, where we must start to regenerate the urban realm by enriching people's relationship with their environment. In San Andrés Cholula, citizens have already created an intrinsic relationship to their urban realm and show solidarity with their environment although they are currently lacking the power or will to participate in the transformation.

In his book "Cities for People" (2010), Gehl describes the importance of design focused on the human scale experience. This process must also take into account the community's input so as to develop a healthy relationship with the city and promote a feeling of self–ownership within the public realm.

One approach to designing cities is that of "five km/h architecture" (Gehl, p. 44) which allows people to experience a more complex and lush sensorial encounter with their immediate surroundings, be it building facades, retail shops, apartments or any other building. This type of architecture takes place at an average person's walking pace as opposed to higher speeds that belong to motorized vehicles. At this pace the city's details come to life.

What does it mean to experience the city at this speed? What the new tendencies in the architectural field are that sustain these principles? How we can implement new strategies for urban design on a human scale?

1.2. New tendencies in urban design: Organizing a functional city

There is a growing interest to focus city growth on how people experience the urban realm close up and at eye level. The implementation of designs that better suit a more personal relationship with the city and help promote interaction within an urban context have proven to help increase security, improve citizen's health and provide a more sustainable way of living. Citizens that feel free and safe to walk or bike around their city and are able to obtain necessary supplies and interact with community members in a comfortable environment usually develop a sense of belonging which in turn results in a sense of well-being.

These arguments have proven useful in cities worldwide where the rehabilitation of abandoned housing, poor service networking and deficient urban infrastructure has increased the quality of life of its inhabitants.

A case in point is Tassafaronga Village, a mixed‑income development in East Oakland, California. In a neighborhood known for violence and crime, an apartment building has risen up for formerly homeless people which gives them quality housing and foments productive activity in the neighborhood by installing retail shops on the building's ground floor. Raye Richardson, one of the architects involved in the design and construction of this new complex, states that his aim is to develop what he calls "healthy urbanism", that includes "features that open the building to the neighborhood instead of making it a fortress, like pedestrian‑friendly remade sidewalks and a glassed and landscaped ground floor. Inside as well as out, the place feels open". (Kimmelman, 2012)

Tassafaronga Village. East Oakland California, USA.
(Picture by Matthew Millman, New York Times, 2012)

As Gehl (2010) explains, when we implement these new concepts of people‑oriented designs, the citizens themselves start to modify how they use the new space provide. (p. 12) He writes that "[T]he close connection

between people's use of the city space, the quality of the city space and degree of concern for the human dimension is a general pattern that can be shown at all scales". (p. 16) It is vital to equip cities with a varied sensorial experience of space, exciting paths and an overall enjoyable community.

It is important to highlight the priority in modifying the design. Previously, architects took full control of the spatial outcome, but now the citizens themselves get to propose the kind of spaces they want and will use (since it will later prove to satisfy the local needs). Due to community involvement in the project, there is a better chance of developing a sense of ownership and thus take proper care of the public (shared) infrastructure. The architect's role is that of a facilitator while the definitive role is played by the citizens themselves.

However, the reality in most cities is that of public policies that favor private transportation and increase travel distances to attain necessary services, leading to the further intensification of urban sprawl. The consequences of expanding urban sprawl in any city are not only at a financial level but also at a social one since this type of growth promotes segregation because the city's social fabric deteriorates and citizens no longer interact with a more heterogenous group of people. Another factor is the accelerating amount of carbon emissions released due to the amount of time spent commuting from the suburbs to the city center.

In the state of Puebla, one of these urban sprawl downsides is exemplified by what is known in Mexico as "social interest" (low-income) housing that has blanketed the outskirts of the city. This is a major issue because many people have had no other choice but to move to these decentralized locations due to high rent costs in other areas. This has meant a strain on the government since it has to provide basic services such as

potable water, electricity, sewage systems and street lighting, but it cannot keep up with the accelerated growth of the new communities.

In Mexico, the National Workers Housing Fund Institute *(INFONAVIT),* the largest government housing assistance agency, helps low and medium income families finance and purchase their homes. In 2011, by public and community demand, this agency incorporated a new program by the name "My Neighbors, My Community" *(Mis Vecinos, Mi Comunidad)* with the objective of restoring more than thirty decaying neighborhoods exhibiting both social and physical deterioration. The restoration will take place in five different aspects: community, security, identity, economy and on an institutional level which helps rescue the agency's facilities as well. The community member's participation in this program is key for its implementation because not only must they pursue a more active roll in their neighborhood's transformation but they must also improve security and develop a sense of identification with the area. *(ww.w.infonavit.org)* Although these institutions have just started work on improving communities, a vast number of dwellings still exist that do not benefit from these changes or are unable to receive government help. Community participation is essential to any program that pursues neighborhood restoration because of the pressure these groups are able to exert on local officials.

Another situation that arises when cities focus their infrastructure development efforts on the private transportation sector is that it creates inequity among citizens especially in developing countries such as Mexico. Gehl writes that, "[W]hile access to cars and motorized transport will increase gradually, for now the great majority of inhabitants have very

limited or no access to cars and motorcycles. Public transport is typically weakly developed, expensive and slow" (2010, p. 215).

In some cities like Medellin, Colombia, government initiatives have focused on implementing, in a very innovative way, different strategies to provide citizens with affordable means of transportation. In 2006, they made a considerable investment in a new project called "Cable Cars Metro Medellin" in which a series of existing ground metro lines were connected to a new system of cable cars that are elevated into the city's low-income settlements in the poorest sector of Medellin. In order to promote ridership, they charged the commuters lower rates. Since the cable cars are a safer way of moving from the center of the city to surrounding areas, are more time efficient and lower gas emissions, the result was improved air quality for the entire urban area. *(www.myclimate.org)* The success of Colombia's public transport systems has inspired other cities around the world to start modifying their own systems with the aim of improving the quality of urban life.

In Mexico CIty, the implementation of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system has been developed to create a new public bus line called *"Metrobus"* that gives passengers a faster and more efficient means of transportation. The public bus system's layout depends on a network of major routes throughout the city and relies on an exclusive lane that makes travel in these high capacity buses more comfortable and less time consuming. Just recently a similar system inaugurated in Puebla and the first route reaches the community of San Bernardino Tlaxcalancingo adjacent to San Andrés Cholula. This population is dedicated to cultivating activities and citizens rely on public transportation to deliver their produce to markets in the city. However, the bus system has failed to meet the citizen's needs and now

denies them access to the buses if they are transporting large packages of produce.

This is one example of how a project's success depends on fulfilling the needs and requirements of the population and its failure when there exists a lack of community participation. In a setting where there is a co‑relationship between rural and urban environments, it is necessary to elaborate programs together in order to maintain and encourage local activities.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the success these BRT systems have had and, although work must be done to properly insert these new systems in complex environments, they usually have beneficial outcomes.

In the United States, for example, by the start of the millennia only three of the nation's 30 largest cities had not started to construct a public transport system like the proposed BRT. Entire sections of cities, especially decaying ones, were being restored by standards proposed by Transit Oriented Development (TOD).

In 2004 the U.S. Federal Transit Board sponsored one of the first studies on how TODs benefit cities, commuters and urban dwellers. In his research, Cervero describes TODs objectives as "a means of promoting smart growth, injecting vitality into declining inner‑city settings, and expanding lifestyle choices". (2004, p. 3) The most notable definition of what the TOD is and what it means to develop and sustain one came from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) that has been marketing the TOD concept to promote the advancement of this new mode of urban construction as "higher than usual densities, mixed land uses, and pedestrian‑friendly designs." Cervero goes on to emphasize that TOD's aim

is to "restore comfortable and enjoyable streetscapes, vibrant and interactive public spaces, and an assemblage of land uses that invite people to stroll, linger, and interact with each other". (p. 7)

In Mexico City, architects are building the first TOD's ever and the result is decreased time in commutes and increased security in dangerous neighborhoods. As to how these development's work, Cervero writes:

> TOD's focus of locating new construction and redevelopment in and around transit nodes is viewed by many as a promising tool for curbing sprawl and the automobile dependence it spawns. Some hope that TOD can breathe new life and vitality into areas of need by channeling public investments into struggling inner-city settings. And by creating more walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods with good transit connectivity, TOD is thought to appeal to the lifestyle preferences of growing numbers of Americans. (2004, p. 3)

Although the common denominator in cities has been to allow urban sprawl expansion, prioritize single car use and increase class distinction by an unfair distribution of services and infrastructure, new urban infrastructures like TODs are being developed in many countries around the world due to their high performance. In fact, their design is based on principles that have been around for decades: increase density, promote mixed uses, income diversity and safe street design.

Bryan Bell in his book "Expanding Architecture: Architecture as Activism", writes that "to support an architecture of change, a foundational theory that is based on action and provides a counterpoint to the current

post-critical turn is necessary. We need a theory that is practicable and asks citizens to participate, architects to reinvent, academic administrators to rethink, and politicians to again become accountable" (2008, p. 22) In the architectural field, it is of the upmost importance to implement these principles in formal design objectives and include the citizen's participation in the process.

An organization that addressed these concerns has been the Social Economic Environmental Design (SEED), which describes itself as a "principle-based network of individuals and organizations dedicated to building and supporting a culture of civic responsibility and engagement in the built environment and the public realm. [...] The network is part of a global movement that believes design can support a community from the ground up." *(http://www.seed-network.org/network/)*

Bell affirms that "the SEED Network's mission is to advance the right of every person to live in a socially, economically, and environmentally healthy community. The network hopes to integrate itself into the larger social-architecture movement, supporting those who believe in design's potential to empower, invigorate, and unify communities" (p. 29)

Promoting these new living patterns is crucial to attaining social equity in cities, especially in developing countries where economic, social and cultural status are clearly differentiated. By providing each citizen more access to services they have the opportunity to enjoy a quality urban lifestyle so that they, in turn, can start giving back to their communities.

The challenge of today is the prioritization of people's needs for space and interaction and adequate systems for the development of community activity that positively impact how the urban realm is shaped.

1.3. Basic principles for better cities

This section describes some of the basic principles used to improve the individual experience of space, in other words, how citizens experience a city on a human scale and from a close vantage point while understanding that the limitations to this view are the unique perspectives of each person entails.

While it is important to design cities in the human dimension, it is also essential to allow citizens to partake in activities that connect themselves to the urban realm. The significance of promoting this interaction is to encourage people to create an emotional bond with their surroundings and thus develop a rich identity with the space they inhabit by promoting a sense of belonging and ownership.

The senses are physical mechanisms that receive information, in which each organ provides us different data and it is through these that we obtain our first experiences of the external world. Things we learn through our senses form impressions on us and give way to a sensation which is the immediate experience generated by stimuli. (Dominguez, p. 10)

Gehl affirms that "universal human activities" exist that must be encouraged within the city and that here individuals develop their sensorial experiences.

> Cities must provide good conditions for people to walk, stand, sit, watch, listen and talk.
> If these basic activities, which are tied to the human sensory and motor apparatus, can take place under good conditions, these and related activities will be able to unfold

in all possible combinations in the human landscape. Of all the city planning tools available, attention to this small scale is the most important. (p. 118)

The implementation of better quality infrastructure especially in the public spaces of a city are determining for the use of these locations.

1.3.1. Walking

The first activity, walking, is the most primal human action we can perform and the most practical one too. Gehl has classified different kinds of walking depending on people's needs or goals.

> A city walk illustrates its many variations: the quick goal-oriented walk from A to B, the slow stroll to enjoy city life or a sunset, children's zig-zagging, and senior citizen's determined walk to get fresh air and exercise or do an errand. Regardless of the purpose, a walk in city space is a "forum" for the social activities that take place along the way as a integral part of pedestrian activities. Heads move from side to side, walkers turn or stop to see everything, or to greet or talk with others. Walking is a form of transport, but it is also a potential beginning or an occasion for many other activities. (p. 120)

Main street leading to the pyramid. San Andrés Cholula, Mexico.
(Picture by Ramirez, 2013)

5 de Mayo. Infrastructure impedes walking and biking. San Andrés Cholula, Mexico. (Picture by Ramirez, 2013)

City strolls can become intimidating and uncomfortable for pedestrians when priority is given to cars, buses and urban nuisances such as electric installations. Cholula is a college town and concentrates its commerce on the student market. Accordingly, the city has become a popular night-life spot and in deed comes alive at night. However, this narrow market emphasis has neglected local citizen's needs which is evident in the limited activity the streets experience during daytime hours.

5 de Mayo. Wide streets for private vehicles and poor pedestrian and bike infrastructure. San Andrés Cholula, Mexico. (Picture by Ramírez, 2013)

Walking is a healthy undertaking that increases the liveliness of spaces when people wander along the streets and enjoy the outside. However, one of the main objectives is to become more energy efficient by providing citizens with all their basic needs within a one kilometer radius because that is what most people are willing walk to acquire necessary commodities. (Gehl, 121) Gehl confirms that "street patterns, the design of space, rich detail and intense experiences influence the quality of pedestrian routes and pleasure in walking" (p. 129)

San Andrés Cholula is a compact city where most services can be found within a one and a half kilometer radius (from the city center) and citizens are accustomed to attaining these services either by walking or biking. However, the existing infrastructure favors private vehicles while

pedestrians are at a distinct disadvantage. Pedestrians, far from enjoying their city, just try to make it from one place to another.

In conclusion, people must be able to safely walk in, around and through the city at all times and as much as possible. This is one of the most important aspects of a lively and healthy city. If obstacles are put in the way of pedestrians, they will be discouraged from walking in their city and will opt for a safer – albeit not environmentally friendly – way of getting around: the use of private vehicles.

It is important to encourage walking and biking within our cities as enriching experiences that promote personal health as well as the city's environmental well-being. Only then will citizens have a new and more positive understanding and approach to their local environment.

1.3.2. Staying and sitting

Other aspects to promote good city dwelling are to boost healthy and interactive activities which Gehl classifies into "moving activities and stationary activities" (p. 134). Although one of the main reasons for people to stay in one place directly depends on the quality of the space.

> Stationary activities can be described very simply on a scale according to degree of necessity. On one end of the scale we find the necessary activities that are not particularly dependent on city quality: street trade cleaning and maintenance. Goods are carried back and forth, and people wait patiently at intersections and bus stops. On the other

end of the scale are the optional, recreational staying activities, including the many stays on benches and café chairs so that people can survey the city and follow city life. Here, the quality of the situation, weather and site are decisive.

Staying activities are very different from one part of the world to another, in developing countries almost all staying activities in cities are dictated by necessity, and by choice in more prosperous countries. (Gehl, p. 134–135)

According to Gehl, one of the upsides to providing places where people can stay within the urban context is that these "staying activities are the key to a lively city, but also the key to a truly delightful city." (p. 147)

In San Andrés Cholula there is a lack of such spaces and the few that exist for public use are in decaying conditions or are used to serve basic needs and are not part of an integral design network.

In the documentary film "Social Life of Small Urban Places"(1988), Whyte conducts a study as to why some public spaces and plazas in the United States are more attractive to people than others. In the beginning, he believes that the weather and the relationship of the space to sun exposure is the predominant factor as to how and why people enjoy space. However, the results of the study indicate that there are other issues that invite citizens to use the city's public space.

The factors that determine whether a plaza is successful or not depend on the variety of activities: people reading, eating, playing games; these were signs that it was a pleasant space to spend time in. People like seeing others and enjoy spaces where they can partake in a passive

community interaction, thus the number one activity that people seemed to enjoy was looking at others, which made one of the plaza's priorities to allow people to stand or sit where they could have a view of human encounters and activity.

Main Plaza. Community workshops held outside the center kiosk. San Andrés Cholula, Mexico. (Picture by Flores, 2013)

An example of this revitalization of space is the kiosk in the main center of San Andrés Cholula. While it had been abandoned for years and was only used on the weekends as a backdrop for a variety of stands it is currently rented out by *"Café Colibrí"*, a Mexican coffee chain, becoming

more attractive to citizens who feel more comfortable in the main square where new activities are taking place.

Another important aspect Whyte acknowledges is the relationship these spaces forge with the community because of the interaction with the world around us, our immediate surroundings and the urban realm. Whyte says, "the street is the river of life of the city, we come to these places not to escape, but to partake of". Hence, we find ourselves involved in vital community activities.

According to Whyte, the "physical features that affect space" are those that determine the success rate of an open public space. These features are:

- Edges. Although the narrow edges can be dangerous, they can also create interesting activity for people and promote a stimulating connection with the space. Edges give people a sense of security around large open spaces and are also wonderful seating areas.

- Steps. While remaining accessible and when not difficult to climb, they are a terrific place to sit down and participate in several social activities; they provide a place where people can sit, stand or lean; and although sometimes these activities may obstruct pedestrian traffic, they usually create a friendly congestion.

- Street corners. These are the elements that connect the city, street and plaza. It is in these spots where people like to interact, sometimes even staying in the middle of subway entrances. Since people like to stay and talk in the geographical center,

these types of actions increase the "chance‑encounter" phenomenon which is when individuals interact with people they already know or venture to meet someone new.

- People just standing there. This is another feature of good quality plazas, when individuals feel comfortable enough not to have to do anything but passively perceive their surroundings.

- The sheltered spot. This is the place located under trees or café umbrellas, that provides a feeling of protection for the inhabitants but at the same time does not dissociate them with what is happening around the plaza.

The true success of a public space is providing people with the visual enjoyment of human activity and interaction. According to Whyte, "it is a site, a place of pleasure to point out to others, to discuss". (1988)A public space should always provide sufficient seating in diverse arrangements. Although San Andrés Cholula's city center has begun to improve these aspects and seek this community interaction, it still lacks spaces in where the aforementioned activities can be conducted.

While the main plaza is a focal point, there are several neglected areas in San Andrés that exhibit an immense potential of becoming spaces where people can enjoy their city. These areas require intervention so that city‑life can be more enjoyable.

1.3.3. Meeting

The underlying principle of all these projects is the promotion of interaction between people because increasing involvement with other individuals gives them a more enhanced sense of community.

Gehl affirms that "[W]arm, intense contacts between people take place at short distances. Small spaces and short distances convey a corresponding experience of warm, intense city environments." (p. 52) One of the advantages of San Andrés Cholula is its relatively small scale and narrow streets which help promote citizens' interaction with public space on a human scale. The city's infrastructure is constantly must focus on how people interact in both public and private space.

A popular local spot where this kind of interaction takes place is Container City, a youth joint located two blocks away from one of the main intersections of the city. It is very popular with university students and younger locals. The open and connected distribution of the ship containers promote interaction between shops and people enjoy the diversity of services. However, the flaw of this project lies in the fact that it is overwhelmingly a nightspot. During the day, businesses are almost empty which lowers rentability and overall image.

Cities that promote interaction between citizens are tending to the existing social fabric and demonstrating a sensitivity as to how people experience their surroundings by giving them a primary role in city life.

1.4. Importance of better city strategies that focus on the human scale experience

There are various groups and individuals who play an important role in the modification of the urban realm. However, it is the citizens themselves who must strive for better-quality cities.

> Cities must urge urban planners and architects to reinforce pedestrianism as an integrated city policy to develop lively, safe, sustainable and healthy cities.
>
> The potential for a lively city is strengthened when more people are invited to walk bike and stay in city space.
>
> The potential for a safe city is strengthened generally when more people move about and stay in city space. A city that invites people to walk must by definition have a reasonably cohesive structure that offers short walking distances, attractive public spaces and a variation of urban functions. These elements increase activity and the feeling of security in and around city spaces.
>
> The sustainable city is strengthened generally if a large part of the transport system can take place as "green mobility", that is travel by foot, bike or public transport.
>
> The desire for a healthy city is strengthened dramatically if walking or bicycling can be a natural part of the pattern of daily activities. (Gehl, p. 6–7)

Cities always benefit from more human activity and interaction but they must also be able to provide the means to perform these actions. In San

Andrés Cholula, there are several organizations working on bringing the community closer to an optimal urban transformation process. While the government has started to improve urban infrastructure, they are not addressing problems that do not allow the city to be healthier, such as recently abolishing the city's bike path and allowing urban sprawl expansion.

If we use all of the aforementioned guidelines and principles, we can envision a city in where citizens have an active role in how the city is shaped, lived and experienced.

Now it is time to think of the city we want to live in and how we want that city to grow and evolve in the next ten to twenty years.