Chapter 2:
SPATIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CITY AND ITS CITIZENS

2. Spatial Relationship Between the City and Its Citizens

A city is made up of many different physical components: roads, urban infrastructure such as lighting and public benches, houses, shops, restaurants and cafés. All of these constitute what we call the built environment: constructions and the space between them. But what makes a city a living organism – what makes it come to life – are the people.

A tangible link exists between the city and its citizens and how the citizens relate to their built environment and in the kind of spatial relationship they have developed within city. In San Andrés Cholula, the citizens are all the individuals that experience the city every day. They walk through it, they drive the roads, they see it, smell it, they buy, share, interact, and grow with it.

The importance of acknowledging this interaction between a city and its citizens lies in the need to make connections. This need is a response to the advancement of technology in the last five years. Real-time communication has augmented our natural social traits and made responses faster and created a more diverse set of social networks.

Since San Andrés and its neighboring city San Pedro Cholula were named a *"Pueblo Mágico"* (Magical Town) last year, several projects have emerged on the social media front including *"Vivir en Cholula"* (Live Cholula), *"Turismo San Andrés Cholula"* (Tourism in San Andrés Cholula) and *"Cholula Mágica"* (Magical Cholula) that highlight how people experience their city and how they would like to transform it. This is one of the first steps towards involving citizens in the creative process of the city and giving them an important role in how it is organized and how utilize space. This citizen

input had not happened previously, but instead, was demanded by the citizens themselves.

This chapter will outline the characteristics of this citizen–city relationship in San Andrés Cholula, suggesting new ways of strengthening it, delineating the participants and illustrating optimal evolvement.

2.1. A brief summary of Cholula's development

Given its increasing population rate and accelerated urban growth, and counting more than 100,000 inhabitants by 2010 (Population and Housing Census. *INEGI*, 2010), San Andrés Cholula is one of the most important cities in the state of Puebla. Located in the central part of Mexico, it is known for its characteristic landscape: two volcanoes by the name of Popocatépetl and Iztlaccíhuatl are the backdrop to a Catholic church set on top of a covered pyramid.

Since its founding and due to the central location of Cholula, the city has suffered from constant power struggles between different groups. The pyramid itself has traditionally been a site of worship and commercial exchange for indigenous people. When the city was taken over during the Spanish conquest, it was divided into two major towns: San Andrés Cholula and San Pedro Cholula. (Dominguez, p. 58)

Pyramid of Cholula in 1978. San Andrés Cholula, Mexico (Picture by Wordpress, 2012)

San Pedro Cholula maintained most of the pyramid's land rights although both cities have always shared the site for religious rituals. In fact, San Pedro Cholula has benefited the most from tourism by placing shops and restaurants along the archaeological site's base since the 1970's when the second phase of excavation was completed. This has created a certain sense of animosity between the two towns because San Andrés Cholula has not received as much economic profit and has remained a secondary locality compared to San Pedro. This disadvantaged position lasted until the beginning of the 1990's when a large commercial complex ‒ Angelópolis ‒ was built in San Andrés providing with a much need new economic status.

In the early 1960's, the city of Puebla expropriated land from San Andrés including the area of Angelópolis which what should have been designated a natural reservoir. Since no important developments existed there the land was relegated to San Andrés Cholula and did not cause a controversy until the erection of the aforementioned commercial complex. Following the construction of this complex, residential expansion of Puebla's wealthiest sector ensued. Currently this area is home to three major universities and several more shopping centers.
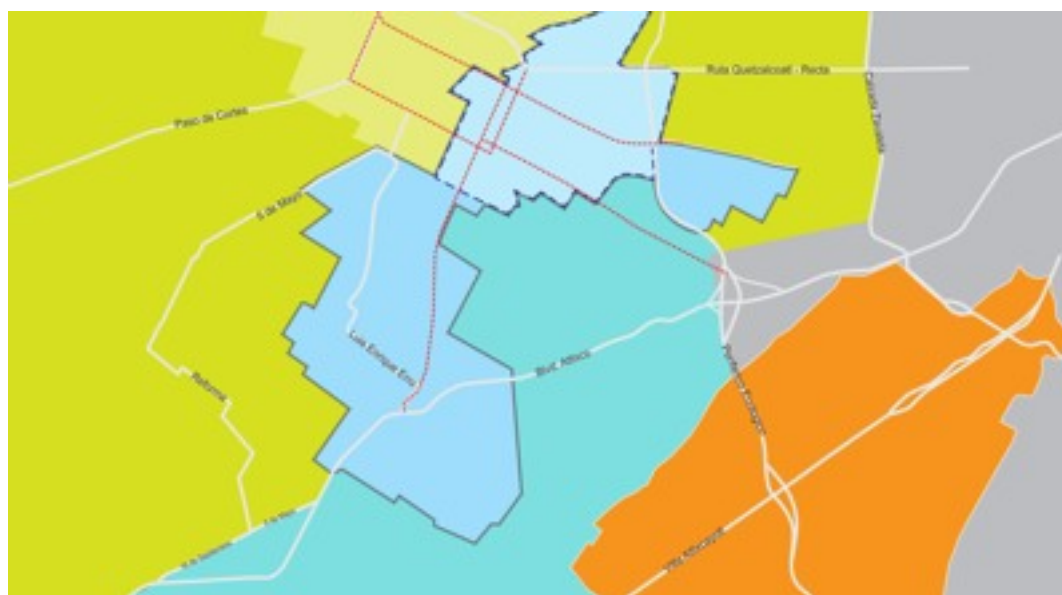
San Pedro Cholula (historic area)   ······· Main roads San Andres Cholula

San Pedro Cholula (peripheral area)   ·········· Official territory boundry

Area of boundry conflict Puebla-Cholula — — - Study limit area (Own-able City)

Study area (Own-able City)   ——— Main roads Puebla-Cholula

San Andres Cholula (official territory)

San Andres Cholula (peripheral area)

Officials of both Puebla and San Andrés continue fighting for the Angelópolis area and they are not likely to recapitulate soon due to its financial importance through tax benefits for the municipality. It is important to take into account the land ownership problematic that San Andrés is currently facing because on a social level we can understand the necessity to maintain their territory and the constant difficulties they have been forced to endure while litigating to maintain their city. This study will focus on the area surrounding the historic center and the area located on the boundary between San Pedro and San Andrés Cholula.

The dramatic scenery of the volcanoes and the covered pyramid attracts a lot of tourism to Cholula but it is the essence of the city's lifestyle that most appeals to locals and visitors. In a recent speech, the Secretary of Tourism, Ángel Trauwitz, said that "the most important feature, without a doubt is the city's people that have participated from the beginning in the creation and development of this beautiful country. *(San Andrés Cholula Pueblo Mágico, meganoticiaspuebla)*

Both cities are extremely attractive and unique. San Andrés Cholula and San Pedro Cholula each have their own style and exceptional qualities. San Pedro has a more traditional style of infrastructure and its city center features a massive sixteenth century convent and a colonial covered arched portal. Due to its proximity to the University of the Americas *(UDLAP)*, San Andrés is more eclectic and maintains an ancestral way of government, In other words, local groups and people who are descendants of the first indigenous families hold positions of authority.

The local setting, including the actual physical space and the social environment of San Andrés Cholula is very diverse: old mixes with new, modern with traditional, and then unexpected elements are added that

impact the way people experience space and how they interact. It is a city where emergence is a common denominator and dictates a way of life. (Jaspeado, 2012) This emergence refers to the city's propensity to embrace change and develop new dynamics. It also exhibits a highly adaptable context where tradition blends with modernity and creates new ways of experiencing surroundings.

Since the 1970's, San Andrés Cholula has been the site for the University of the Americas *(UDLAP)* a higher education institution that attracts a very diverse and international alumni who come both to study and settle down in the area. (Dominguez, p. 7) The existence of a large academic population has exposed locals to other cultures and backgrounds and has provided the population with a complex social fabric.

The complexity of this social fabric is illustrated by the variety of lifestyles held in the area of the city, especially given the contrasting interaction between locals and the university community. Although these two groups did not interact much during the university's first years, over time the two groups have established a more collaborative relationship.

Another phenomenon that emerged over time was that of students staying in Cholula after concluding their studies and settling in the city . Usually, these former students partake in the service industry and open new businesses. The younger members of the student community gave these people the name of "forevers" which alludes to the fact that they never abandoned the relaxed student lifestyle.

A case in point is the local bakery, Mostovoi, established in 2009 by three former students Blake Anderson, Alejandro Villalpando and Juan Tello. In a recent interview, they explained that one of the main reasons why they decided to open their business was because both Villalpando and Tello,

upon graduating, had restrictive formal jobs and did not enjoy the company culture. "We did not like the idea of being in an office", Villalpando remarked. As to why they decided to open their business in San Andrés Cholula, one of the now two remaining owners said that "I thought everything was cheaper here, compared to Mexico City. We were also familiar with everything around here. We knew the people and the environment. There were several positive factors to take into account." (Villalpando, 2012) San Andrés Cholula's charm lies in its variety and its accessible living costs and it provides people with a sense of novelty and surprise in their ever-changing urban landscape.
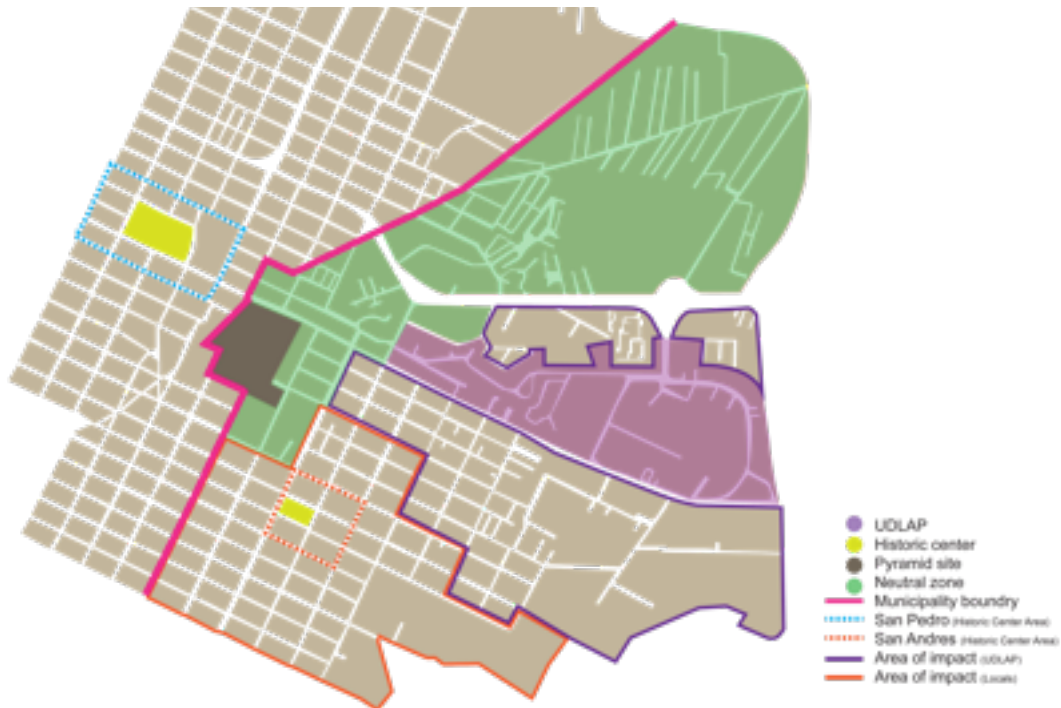
In recent years, more and more former students have decided to stay in San Andrés Cholula and establish their lives in what they perceive to be a more familiar environment. Anderson affirms that Cholula's location is very centric to other cities in the country which helps maintain your independence but still stay in touch with others. The central location of the city in reference to other major urban areas in Mexico is an important factor in its development and gives it an advantage over other populations and makes it a great commercial location.

Anderson and Villalpando have been living in Cholula for almost 10 years and affirm that one of the best qualities of the city is its quiet and familiar environment. This has attracted not only students but a growing number of families who want to get away from the "big city" – Puebla – and single professionals looking for affordable housing. On this subject Villalpando said, "I like the feeling of living in a small town –although it is not one anymore – in general, you can lead a relaxing lifestyle". He also remarked on the social environment in the city, stating that "people are always changing here; there are always new people, people that come and

go, that makes for a very changing environment in Cholula, which mixes stability with variability". While stability is evident in the preservation of local customs and traditions, variability can be seen in the diversity of the growing population.

Within this social context, this stability is exemplified by the importance of people living in indigenous households. Although only 2% of the total population *(http://www.nuestro-mexico.com/Puebla/San-Andres-Cholula/)* may not seem like much, this population has an impact on how the city evolves. The indigenous population sets the guidelines for the traditions and customs and the survival of native languages and dialects.

Anderson affirms that "there are two large forums, you could even describe them as antagonistic groups, which are the student class – and all the industry and business that comes with it – and the local people, people that really live here, whose ancestors have lived here and that are traditionally from here. To a certain point, these two groups are always in friction". Although it is true that these two sectors have not always had a good rapport, the relationship is mutually beneficial in both the social and economic areas.

UDLAP
Historic center
Pyramid site
Neutral zone
Municipality boundry
San Pedro (Historic Center Area)
San Andres (Historic Center Area)
Area of impact (UDLAP)
Area of impact (Locals)

This growing relationship has been manifested in the city's infrastructural transformation by the modifications witnessed in the past decade. Anderson states that "the most impacting thing about Cholula has been its urban growth. When I first arrived in 2001, the city had a more rural feel to it ₍stating that it is not as rural as it used to be when he first arrived₎, even the most transited street now ₋ La Catorce, where most of the clubs, businesses and movement are ₋ had more fields and a larger cultivating area, it was more a feeling of towns₋people, of farmers. In these last 10 years, I have seen a drastic change in the urban realm, or rather, it has become more urban." Although this process of urbanization is inevitable, it is important to support local activities and maintain the area´s traditions, both social and economically.

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This transformation process from a rural setting to a predominantly urban one is sometimes known as peri‑urbanization. Simon, McGregor and Thompson write that "the term peri‑urbanization refers to a process, often a highly dynamic one, in which rural areas located on the outskirts of established cities become more urban in character" (2004). In the case of San Andrés Cholula, the development of the Angelópolis area by the city of Puebla created a physical connection between the two cities, bringing services closer and extending the urban sprawl. It also made it more difficult to distinguish between the boundaries of either territory. Webster and Muller affirm that:

> Peri‑urban development usually involves rapid social change, as small agricultural communities are forced to adjust to an urban or industrial way of life in a very short time. High levels of immigration are an important driver of social change. (2004)

Although San Andrés Cholula has always been an established town, it was not until the last decade that it had enough population growth to be properly classified as a city. With over 80,000 inhabitants by 2005 (*INEGI*, 2006) it more than doubled the 1995 census.

Perhaps it is the limitless possibilities of this place that make it so appealing, the wide variety of lifestyles that are shared in the same setting or the urban facilities in a quasi‑rural context or the social diversity that creates more opportunities to interact with others. One thing is certain: people keep coming, staying on and making this city their home. The city's

openness to newcomers while maintaining local identity is one of the key elements that allow it to thrive.

The urban realm has transformed and now provides citizens with novel services and experiences. Anderson and Villalpando say that "[Cholula] has diversified because now you see things that had never existed before, places like Container City, vegetarian restaurants, a yoga center and a training facility for boxing. Some businesses have branched out but those who started out here [such as clubs and bars] have grown exponentially". This diversity has emerged to satisfy citizens' needs and is a testament to the city's complex social fabric.

These factors lead us to affirm that the urban realm is a direct manifestation of people's needs and the social environment characteristic of the area. Not only has the population grown in the past years, but their tastes and requirements have changed and the citizens are increasingly heterogenous. This modification in the population's composition is due to the cultural hybridization process experienced by the two contrasting groups of Cholula: locals and the university community. In order to reach a consensus, it is imperative to highlight the similarities between the groups in order to reach a common ground, for example the urban realm, and then establish a new shared concept of the city.

In his work "The Relationship Between the Built Environment and Wellbeing", Butterworth affirms that "the built environment provides the setting and backdrop by which we live our lives, and impacts our senses, our emotions, participation in physical activity and community life, our sense of community, and general wellbeing. Meanings are generated by buildings and spaces, which we 'read' as we pass through them". (p. ii) This relationship with the built environment is reciprocal because not only do the

surroundings affect us, but we also have a direct impact on how the city is shaped. In "reading" San Andrés Cholula, we see a town in the process of transformation into an important urban area that is still trying to maintain a rural ambiance. These opposing features create a confusing rendering of the built environment because citizens are not sure what to expect from continuing city growth and modernization.

The city is a stage where lives and situations are played out and made more complex with the involvement of others. In San Andrés Cholula, there is a variety of actors of different economic classes, diverse professions, fluctuating age groups and varied backgrounds who all come together in the same space. Mediating this diversity allows opportunity for both individual and community growth in the social context.

The social perspective of San Andrés Cholula's growth is a significant aspect of the city. It is the story of citizens that arrive here as refugees, people that have been cast out of their original homes and must find somewhere new to settle be it for political, academic, economic or cultural reasons. Nowadays, it has become a choice citizens make to live and partake in the city's transformation. All these features have made Cholula the distinct locale it is today and, with the help of its citizens, the built environment can be improved.

2.2. Outline of Cholula's social environment

For us to make a clear assessment of what the social environment in San Andrés Cholula is like, we must first define the concept. Barnett and Casper, in the American Journal of Public Health, have noticed a growing concern for

the idea of improving the social environment as a response to people's health issues. They explain that "human social environments encompass the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact. Social environments can be experienced at multiple scales, often simultaneously, including households, kin networks, neighborhoods, towns and cities, and regions. Social environments are dynamic and change over time as the result of both internal and external forces". (2001)

One of the main features attributed to San Andrés Cholula is its willingness to include new members in its social scheme while preserving ancient customs and rituals. Nevertheless, a marked difference exists between socio-economic classes and it is generally the privileged who determine major city structures.

If we visualize the city as a stage, with its actors as key elements in transforming it, then it is their wants and needs that should be satisfied. In addition, there must be a wide scope that encompasses the majority of the citizens. The question of who shapes and modifies the urban landscape has been one of recurring principal actors with unilateral visions – alternately the government and private investors – whose focus is usually on increasing profit and not necessarily on improving the social fabric of the city. Baum states that "cities should be places of laughter, loving, working, learning, selling, buying, dying, birth, debating, politicking; in short a place to fulfill our emotional, social and physical needs". (p. 33) The citizen's role entails a more practical action – transforming the city – and should be a vital factor in city strategies and urban growth.

In his book, "The Right to the City", Harvey tackles the idea of what elements should shape cities. He affirms that:

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. (p. 23)

Citizens must become involved in the development of their city. It is the government's duty to include the community in the decision-making in process of urbanization and reinforce the impact these individuals or groups have on the evolution of their surroundings. Butterworth asserts that "humans have a strong drive to make sense of the environment and to be involved with it". It is in this space – where citizens can get involved in their urban surroundings – that we have the most creative responses for the configuration of the urban realm. He goes on to state that "we prefer environments that afford us safety, food and shelter. We are also motivated to locate environments where our curiosity will be stimulated, whilst at the same time affording a degree of certainty". (Butterworth, p. iii) San Andrés Cholula is the rule and not the exception. People gather in the same spots because they know what to expect from these spaces. They reject others that are uninteresting or unknown to them.

San Pablo Tecamac Church and Container City. Two contrasting public places between the main social groups that comprise San Andrés: locals are known for maintaing customs and religious traditions while the student night-life in Cholula is a famous activity, although these two are highly popular in each group, they rarely converge.

When defining the social environment of a city, especially one like San Andrés Cholula, it is crucial to take into account the variability of citizens and the heterogenous nature of the population living in the same shared space. Indeed, single concept is essential to the city's layout: human activity and interaction. These elements are detonators for how our urban realm is modeled.

The search for this type of interaction between varying social groups is the collective project *Público Libre* (Free Public) established by members of the San Andrés Cholula community who decided to project free movies in a public forum. These cinematographic offerings are held at the base of public steps located alongside the pyramid's museum site and attract people of various social and economic backgrounds. The main objective of this collective project is to promote social interaction through culture. In addition, it has had an effect on how people view public space and has become a place where diverse social groups interact with the built environment.

Público Libre forum. San Andrés Cholula, México (Picture by Ramirez, 2013)

It is important to understand how citizens respond to the need for public space and community interaction while maintaining their privacy. Butterworth writes:

> People are engaged in a dialectic relationship between the need for privacy and the need for social interaction. Physical environments can help or hinder our need to find solitude and identify our own personal private 'territory'. Territory defines the 'degree and permanence of ownership'. People use two mechanisms – personal space and territorial behaviour – to regulate their need for privacy. Primary territory, over which we attempt to have complete control, includes our homes, and gardens, or personal space within shared accommodation. Secondary territory refers to spaces which are under the partial control of the occupant, such as the space outside an apartment or house. Public territories are less easy to define. Entrances, play areas, and hallways are all secondary public territories. Intrusion can result when a terriotry has been inappropriately defined. Therefore, clear delineation is essential to maintaining harmony. (p. 18)

In the transformation of San Andrés Cholula, it is primordial to highlight these different types of spaces and to encourage community interaction in public areas.

Since the city is a stage for human activity and interaction, we have found that even though there are a variety of existing spots in San Andrés Cholula that promote social encounters and community life, there are also other locations that are in need and / or in the process of revival.

Such is the case of the project *Kiosko de Santiago Xicotenco*, a deteriorated public space located in front of the catholic church by the same name. Although the church hosts regular masses and has a high attendance rate, citizens have disposed of this space due to a lack of activities proposed for the area.

Santiago Xicotenco Kiosk. Deteriorated public space. San Andrés Cholula, Mexico. (Picture by Ramírez, 2013)

The project was proposed by David Rosales, a psychology student at the University of the Americas, with the aim of developing a participative use of this public space and enhancing the area´s social fabric. In a recent interview, Rosales affirmed that this proposal is based on using the arts as a means of encouraging citizen participation.

In the distinctive social environment of San Andrés Cholula, like Rosales and the group behind *Público Libre* it is evident that citizens are taking action in transforming the urban surrounding by enhancing individual and community interaction, taking into account the diverse social setting and using public space as an optimal forum for the democratization of society.

2.3. Transforming space: how people transform urban surrounding

In the preceding paragraphs, I have described examples of businesses, organizations and individuals that have contributed to the modification of San Andrés Cholula's built environment. Furthermore, they have helped to diversify and promote social interaction between different groups and members of the community. Increasingly, these forms of participation within urban boundaries have helped diminish class and cultural differences. A current description of the city of San Andrés Cholula by Dominguez affirms that the city is a physical and vivid stage that can be understood only through its concrete characteristics; however, it is also a product of the objectification of individual and collective actions that are registered in a specific space through time. Seen this way, the city not only proposes new ways of arranging space but also new ways of living it. It entails the cultural construction of space, in which culture refers to the consolidation of social life as well as the spirit of the city itself. (p. 27)

Urban Art. San Andrés Cholula, Mexico. (Picture by www.albino.mx, 2012)

For consolidation to take place, individuals must first admit to a relationship with the city which drives them to positively contribute to the overall social climate. This relationship with the urban realm is both physical and psychological and has been proven to be an important factor in personal satisfaction. Butterwroth affirms:

> The built environment has a direct influence on people's wellbeing inasmuch as it encourages or inhibits physical activity. Physical features such as bicycle paths and footpaths not only need to exist, but must be sufficiently wide, maintained, attractive, well-lit, and networked to other resources. Physical activity is also affected by people's sense of community, their sense of safety, and

their sense of collective political capacity in preserving important community resources such as parks and community centers.

Urban spaces that are inclusive will be designed to provide opportunities for a wide range of people to participate in these spaces, especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, buildings and footpaths will have prominent disability access, roads will have sufficient pedestrian crossings to allow people to cross with ease and with limited waiting times, public transport will be designed to encourage patronage by people regardless of mobility, streetscapes will be attractive and well-lit to promote safety and after-hours access by women and children. There will be special places for young people to congregate which provide a range of leisure and learning opportunities. This will provide young people with an opportunity to interact with people from other age groups, thereby breaking down social barriers, fostering a sense of belonging, and encouraging young people to take on adult roles and enhance their social skills. (Butterworth, iii–iv)

For any city, it is vital to provide spaces that decrease frictions and increase conviviality between diverse social, economic and cultural groups, not by segregating these different entities, but by bringing them together. This can be achieved by developing locations to extend citizens a wide variety of services and experiences.

These locations in a city can take place in two different settings: hard and soft infrastructure. Within the urban realm, as Butterworth explains, the built environment contains "the basic services that are needed to keep a

society running", otherwise known as infrastructure. 'Hard' infrastructure refers to those services that are delivered physically, such as roads, communications, drinking water mains, sewage systems, and utilities such as electricity and gas. 'Soft' infrastructure refers to services delivered by people, such as education, recreation, bureaucracy and emergency services such as police officers and fire fighters. (p. x) When combined, these two infrastructures form a complex stage where the city's actors – the citizens – can exchange experiences with other community members. While the mere existence of these spots is important, it is actually the people who bring them to life with the actual utilization of the space, the urban interphase.

Another relationship that individuals experience is the emotional attachment they confer to certain places.

Places can act "to define the individuals to themselves and to the world", especially when people fulfill a particular role in that place, such as a nurse in a local hospital, or a child taking on the role of student at a local school. Rivlin noted the connection between place attachment, the development of local connections and roots linked to a person's personal history, and feelings of comfort and security. Place attachment reflects the expectations people hold as to where and how they plan to live their lives in the future. When cherished places, spaced, and settings are destroyed or irrevocably changed beyond our control, we feel a sense of loss and grief similar to that felt at the loss of a personal relationship which was expected to last indefinitely. (Butterworth, p. 7)

For people to retain their local identity, they rely on a certain stability in the built environment. Then, they establish a set of non-varying images of the city and assign them an emotional value. This is why "safe, attractive public spaces and venues need to be built to encourage community mingling and socializing. The path to community participation begins with seeing, and knowing, liking, trusting, and finally, acting". (Butterworth, p. 9)

This local imagery is part of the collective memory that describes the essence of a city and allows personal identification with the surroundings. Butterworth writes:

> Neighborhoods can be designated by government officials for administrative purposes. Alternatively, they can develop organically over time resulting from extended patterns of interaction, folklore and identification. Membership can derive from the symbolic boundaries and landmarks that people use to denote their neighborhood such as roads, railway lines or buildings or other, more subtle markers, such as signage or graffiti. There is a great importance linked to shared symbols and the sense of community. The symbolism of locally treasured architectural landmarks can provide a sense of collective identity as well as serve as a boundary from other districts. They provide people with a sense of membership and belonging. As a neighborhood's buildings – public landmarks as well as private houses – provide the physical backdrop by which people live their lives, attend local community events and interact with each other, it thus follows that people will develop a shared emotional connection to their local built community landmarks. (Butterworth, p. 12)

If we promote individuals and group identification with urban surroundings, not only will a shared emotional connection be established, but perhaps new landmarks will be created for the community. This sense of contributing for local benefit is completely inclusive and takes into account the most important aspect of the modification of the urban realm: people. When citizens connect for a common purpose, they explore the sense of belonging to a community and to the city itself. When these actions are translated into urban design, the end result is a city of our own.