



# Post-Urbanism in San José: Social Exclusion through Transitions in Public Space

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## Abstract

Like many other aspiring world-class cities, San José is engaged in an elite-oriented urban transformation in which hybrid (public/private) forms of planning characterize the norm. These new regulatory regimes are enabled through the adoption of neoliberal *laissez-faire* policies. According to the findings of this research, privatization, securitization and disneyfication are main drivers that facilitate and produce mechanisms that restrict certain user groups from (post) public spaces. This study demonstrates that this transition from public to post public space goes hand in hand with less apparent forms of socio-spatial exclusion, on the basis of the comprehensive study of two cases; *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*. It furthermore underscores how these processes are linked to a wide range of entrepreneurial urban governance strategies and to social and cultural perceptions of *others* that are embedded and reproduced in legal discourses. “Inappropriate” space users, such as street vendors, gender-based minorities and groups of youth are hereby disadvantageously affected, which indicates that the ongoing transition in public space in San José is partly raced and classed. The binary conception of citizenship that these developments bring forward is entangled with questions of social justice and belonging while creating issues of democracy and equity in the city.

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## List of abbreviations

<b>GAM</b>	Gran Área Metropolitana
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>POPS</b>	Privately Owned Public Space
<b>TESS</b>	Toolkit for the Ethnographic Study of Space
<b>BCCR</b>	Banco Central de Costa Rica
<b>EUG</b>	Entrepreneurial Urban Governance
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technologies
<b>PLN</b>	Partido Nacional Liberación
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SEZ</b>	Special Economic Zone
<b>ZDEE</b>	Zona de Desarrollo Económico Especial

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## 1. Introduction

The last decade has brought forward an emerging field of public space research as a reaction on the documentation of an alarming decline in the quantity and quality of public spaces all around the world. At the same time, processes of urbanization are taking place with historically unprecedented speed, which has led to the fact that more than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas. According to the United Nations (UN), that number will increase to two-thirds of humanity by 2050 (UN Habitat, 2016). Simultaneously, private investors are increasingly handed over the power to shape urban landscapes through urban laissez-faire policies (Kohn, 2004; Mehaffy & Haas, 2018; Murray, 2017; Németh, 2009; van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015). These trends among sprawling suburbs, gated communities and shopping malls characterize the so-called “post-urban” or “revanchist” city (Mehaffy & Haas, 2018; Murray, 2017). Post-urban cities are presenting new challenges to our metropolitan regions and municipalities.

This process goes hand in hand with the emergence of new *hybrid* forms of urban governance and decreased state authority. The increased interest of municipal authorities to represent a *world-class* city and the *privatisation*, *disneyfication* and *securitization* of public space are producing different consequences for different groups of people regarding their uses of space in the city (Lawton, 2007). Existing research points to the fact that an important driving force behind this increased privatization of public spaces has to do with the growing focus and exposure to risks and threats that exist in modern society. Market-oriented planning seems to be a way to respond to these threats and risks by allowing private agents and developers to deal with these societal fears (Bech, 1986; Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 2006).

These processes in which certain groups are allocated decreased rights of being in urban spaces contradict several of the principles anchored in the *Right to the City* that implies the right to the uses of city spaces, the right to inhabit and the right to participation and appropriation, which includes the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy, and use urban space (UN Habitat, 2016). According to the New Urban Agenda, the promotion of socially inclusive, integrated, connected, accessible, environmentally sustainable and safe public spaces is key in the process of *re-urbanising* the *post-urban* city. These aims are part of the larger urban planning discourse, in which a paradigm shift can be observed towards emphasizing the benefits on offer for sustainable urban development through a people-centered approach (Mehaffy & Haas, 2018).

The need of quality public spaces in a post-urban world is recently reflected in the “New Urban Agenda”, established during the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. This agenda illustrates the importance of public space in creating more socially, economically and ecologically successful and sustainable cities. This is reflected in goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals: “Build cities and human settlements that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. One of the targets set out in this goal is “by 2030, provide universal access to safe,



*inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities”* (UN Habitat, 2016, p. 9)

In Costa Rica, urban public spaces have been affected by the adoption of several neoliberal policy reforms, liberalizing markets but also increasing economic uncertainties. Between 1990 and 2014, income inequality and unemployment have increased sharply in the country (Sandoval-Garcia, 2013). The reduced state interference in socioeconomic and spatial development has opened more space to private capital interests. As a result of this, private actors have been able to increase their control over urban development and planning by investing in urban lands (Coy, 2006; van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015; Ruiz & Segura, 2018). These developments make San José, the capital city of Costa Rica, interesting scenery in which to perform a research after transitions in public space. The municipal government is currently focusing on the regenerating and re-imagining the capital by introducing certain urban policies. These policies are mainly aimed at attracting investors and tourists in order to increase urban competitiveness.

In and around the city of San José, an exponential growth of the suburban areas can be observed together with a decline of the former urban cores. This spatial fragmentation can be seen as a reflection of the social segregation within society and the growing inequality in the distribution of wealth in the city. Furthermore, hybrid public-private forms of public space management allow the erosion of public space’ social functions and the exclusion of undesirable users through increased control and the construction of high-end *designer* spaces (Németh, 2009). These processes have a negative effect on the quality of life of people living in the *Gran Área Metropolitana* or Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM). Less social participation and cohesion and increased social exclusion lead to the transformation of a culture of solidarity into a culture of individualism with people spending more time in shopping malls instead of public parks and squares (van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015; Segura, 2012; Pujol, Sanchez, & Perez, 2011).

In San José, the consequences of such processes are already visible in a societal withdrawal of the public domain in combination with a manifestation of the highest perceived insecurity rates in the region, while actual crime rates are approximately the lowest (van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015). These developments seriously risk the notion of citizenship. In addition, recent political unrest in Nicaragua is likely to have caused an increase in the number of (Nicaraguan) street vendors in San José (Malone, 2019). This increase and the changing urban policy is causing more urban conflicts and calls for a better understanding of the consequences of such urban processes, in order to be able to come to sustainable solutions in the future. For these reasons, a study like this is especially relevant in aspiring world-class city San José, where inequality is increasing and public spaces are decreasing and eroding (Sandoval-Garcia, 2013; van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015).

Although many scholars have studied the structural basis of exclusion and segregation in societies, few have done this through a study on the uneven distribution and accessibility of space in the city (Low, 2009). Furthermore, while the last decade has presented an emerging field of research on public space and the importance of its

role in societies (Aptekar, 2015; Lawton, 2007; Kohn, 2004) a limited number of studies so far have focused on semi or post public spaces or on the transition between the latter. The inherent variability in the management of spaces in transition complicates determining broader management approaches and partly explains dearth of empirical work on this subject to date (Németh, 2009). This study aims to contribute to the identification of indirect mechanisms and less apparent forms of urban exclusion in order to acknowledge and perhaps challenge them, as has been urged by Kohn (Kohn, 2004).

Since many urban spaces around the world are currently in transition from public spaces to becoming less or post public spaces (Low, 2006; Kohn, 2004; Murray, 2017) it is relevant to understand what drives these transitions and what the consequences of these transitions are. It is thereby necessary to ask the question to which degree and in what ways such a transition goes hand in hand with an increase in the exclusion of certain groups or “urban undesirables” from public spaces. It seems as if this transition in publicness and accessibility, or at least the detrimental consequences of such, are being overlooked by governments and policy makers. This may partly be due to the fact that infrastructures often change too slowly for people to notice. It seems as if they simply exist and are therefore rarely questioned (Edwards, 2002).

The following research question is posed: *“To what extent does the transition from public to post public in San José space goes hand in hand with socio-spatial exclusion?”* This question is answered through the comprehensive study of two case studies; *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*. Hereby, three sub-questions are examined. These questions address the physical characteristics of both spaces, the usage patterns of both spaces and the different mechanisms of exclusion. The subject is first introduced by means of a theoretical framework that discusses the relevant conceptual content. In addition, more information concerning the local context is provided in the regional thematic framework.

Subsequently, the methodology of this research is discussed. Chapter five presents the first results chapter, in which both the historical analysis and the results relating to the physical characteristics and patterns of use of both case studies are presented. Chapter 6 describes the three exclusionary impetuses that are distinguished in this research, namely securitization, privatization and disneyfication. Each of these three drivers is subdivided into sub-headings that represent different mechanisms of exclusion. These mechanisms are illustrated and explained using empirical examples. The results are followed by the discussion in chapter 7 and the conclusion in chapter 8.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Before going into the processes that influence the accessibility and publicness of public spaces worldwide, it is necessary to thoroughly understand the notion of public space. This section elaborates on the definition and role of public space in cities and describes several processes that influence public spaces in cities nowadays. The processes that are discussed in this section are the privatization and securitization of public space, changes in urban governance, the urge of governments to “clean up the city”, described as disneyfication and the increased attention for the “right to the city” as declared by the United Nations.

### 2.1 The notion of public space

According to Lawton (2007), public spaces can be defined as the focal points of our everyday life, or the ‘everyday’ space in which we interact with each other, such as the streets, parks and shopping centres. He states that the public domain of towns, cities and suburbs are a reflection of the overall condition of an economy and society. Examples are parks, playgrounds, squares, streets, markets and malls. The amount of interaction that takes place in these spaces can be seen as a reflection of a society’s core community values (Lawton, 2007). Furthermore, a vibrant public life promotes health, makes cities safer, can create economic mobility and opportunity and builds social capital (Gehl Institute, 2017).

One of the most recent international definitions of public space offered by the United Nations Charter of Public Space reads as follows: “*Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive*” (UN Habitat, 2016, p. 26). Hereby, it is stated that the notion of public space as a common good implies its accessibility by all with no direct cost to the user, and also its spirit of public service without any purpose other than contributing to the overall quality of life. This UN definition excludes places like shopping malls as public spaces since they hold a clear profit motive. Public spaces that have become more private through processes like *financialization* are labeled as *post public* spaces (Murray, 2017).

Ever since World War two, a slow decline in public space in cities in the United States can be observed. However, this process has not been as linear in Latin American cities. Factors that are often said to contribute to the decline of public space are skyscrapers, sub-urbanisation, consumerism and digital technologies. While these factors are becoming more present in Latin America, they remained unpronounced for a period of time (Rosenthal, 2000). Many Latin American countries consist of urban characteristics that help protect public space, like plaza-centered grid plans, wide public transport systems, historic interest of urban elites in protecting the vitality of centre-city zones, long workday breaks and well-developed collective memories (Rosenthal, 2000). Public space has had a prominent role in Latin American societies for a considerable period of time. They are important spaces in which citizens can express their cultural, political and social norms and values through protests and celebrations (Rosenthal, 2000; Coy, 2006).

A currently on-going debate discusses whether or not public space should be concerned an urban commons or not. While some say that public space is one of the most typical contemporary commons since they are open-access and shared by many (van Lindert & Lettinga, 2014; Harvey, Kihato, & Skinner, 2018), others dispute the notion of public space as an urban commons, since most public spaces are inherently state-owned. According to Garnett, urban public space can be seen as an urban commons due to the limited ownership rights of local governments over public space. She bases this finding on a number of lawsuits considering the use of public space that were lost by local governments due to the assertion of certain rights enshrined in the constitution (Garnett, 2012).

Classifying public space as a commons enshrined with a rights-based approach in which public space is seen as an urban commons that *should* be accessible to everyone. Ribot and Peluso propose a different definition in the closely related debate concerning the term “access”. They explain how they define “access” as “the ability to derive benefits from things” instead of “the right to benefit from things” in order to bring attention to a wider range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). According to the UN: *Commons were traditionally defined as the elements of the environment – forests, atmosphere, rivers, fisheries or grazing land – that were shared, used and enjoyed by all. Today, the commons can also include public goods, such as public space, public education, health and the infrastructure that allows our society to function* (UN Habitat, 2016, p. 8). It thus seems as if different academic and institutional actors have different takes on public space as a commons.

One of the most influential spatial thinkers is Henri Lefebvre. In his work on the production of space, Lefebvre refined the traditional dichotomy of spatial thinking of the planned versus the lived space into a conceptual triad consisting of the planned, lived and perceived dimensions (Lefebvre, 1991). Hereby, the planned dimension is the constructed space, designed by professionals and urban planners. This dimension is imposed on space users. The perceived dimension concerns the mental realm, where space is imagined to be, or the range of perceptions that different people have on a certain space. The third and last dimension, the lived space, is space as it is actually encountered and directly lived through daily experiences of users (Chevalier, 2018).

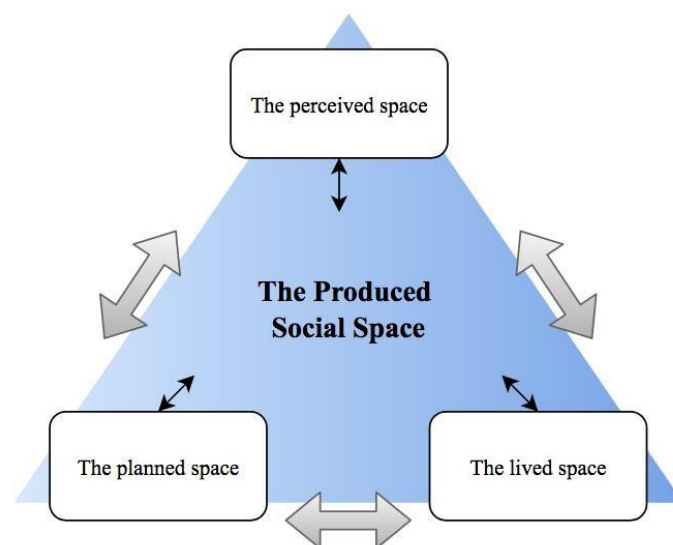


Figure 1: The spatial triad by Lefebvre

According to Levebvre, these three dimensions need to be in line with each other, in order for individuals to be able to move from one dimension to another without confusion. People tend to not feel comfortable in a certain space when different dimensions do not coincide. This happens for example when the perceived dimension conflicts the lived dimension. Therefore, people aim to plan space in such a way that the three dimensions are in synch with each other. This theoretical finding is reflected upon in this study.

## 2.2 New forms of urban land governance

Ever since the start of the new millennium, private investors have steadily asserted their control over the management of urban space, as a result of the neoliberal *laissez-faire* policies adopted by nation states (Thibert & Osorio, 2014). New regulatory regimes like public-private partnerships have in many cases either replaced or greatly undermined public authority. This hybrid (public-private) form of planning is characterizing the norm in aspiring world-class cities around the world (Murray, 2017). As a result of this, cities become more and more filled with privately owned and managed enclaves like gated residential communities and enclosed shopping malls, as is the case in San José (van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015). Privately owned public spaces (POPS) are another example of the outcomes of these hybrid forms of governance (van Lindert & Lettinga, 2014)

In this way, city government is increasingly becoming just one of the many actors competing for the control of urban space. Where its original role lied in fostering the integration of various communities and the equalization of opportunities across the urban landscape, urban planners now take responsibility for managing selective developmental initiatives and promote the city's entrepreneurial credentials (Murray, 2017). This shift in governance replaces branches of city administrations by “in-between” administrative entities like public-private partnerships, non-profit corporate entities, stakeholder associations, non-governmental organisations and incorporated property-owner associations. These actors now assume a great deal of control over shape, form, culture and atmosphere of the spaces that they supply and oversee (Mehaffy & Haas, 2018).

## 2.3 The privatization, disneyfication and securitization of public space

The earlier mentioned public-private partnerships and their increased role in managing urban space has led to a significant redrawn in the boundaries between public and private spheres and the commodification of urban space. Public space is increasingly becoming treated as a valuable commercial commodity. Corporate real-estate developers and municipal authorities have tried to re-establish the historic functions of public spaces in societies through the production of so-called *designer spaces*. These sanitized spaces operate as social sites for “appropriate users” (Murray, 2017). This process is also called the *disneyfication* of public spaces (Toolis, 2017).

The process of privatization of public space accelerates through the redesign of plazas and parks, the creation of privatized governance bodies that replace public authority and the expansion of aggressive policing that target the urban poor (Low,

2009). On the other hand, in cities or regions with small financial resources and limited managing capacities, public spaces are increasingly neglected and abandoned. These underutilized spaces, called “cracks in the city” easily turn into “dead spaces”, accompanied by fear, tension and conflict. Impoverished public spaces like these become “danger zones” for anxious urban residents (Mehaffy & Haas, 2018).

Privately managed designer spaces, also called post public or pseudo public spaces are a new popular form of social congregation. However, these places are characterized by the expectation of conformity from which those for some reason deemed “unsuitable” or “threatening” are excluded. These processes are increasingly often facilitated by public and private security services that monitor and control the uses of public space (Kohn, 2004; Sandercock, 2003; Segura, 2012). This increasing presence of security forces in public spaces is called the *securitization* of public space. Privatized, disneyfied and securitized urban spaces do not appear to lead to diversification but rather to uniformity and conformist consumption. While these transitions are taking place in cities all over the world, widespread academic and political attention towards the topic and the accompanying risks of exclusion lacks.

#### **2.4 Cleaning up the city and the right to the city**

The selling of the image of a world-class city is producing *city-winners* and *city-losers*. In cities with high degrees of class stratification, conflicts arise among various social groupings regarding the questions of who is entitled to use a public space and for what purposes. Property owners, upscale consumers, municipal authorities and local retail establishments stand against street vendors, itinerant traders and ambulant work-seekers (Murray, 2017). As an attempt to modernize the public spaces of cities, municipal authorities often impose strict rules, regulations and limitations on the uses of parks, streets and other gathering places. Livelihoods of individuals depending upon these places for their socioeconomic survival are thereby harmed (Low, 2009).

These regulatory frameworks on the uses of public spaces are creating new kinds of urban segregation in which street vendors and citizens are allocated into differentiated places rights to mobility. This binary conception of citizenship stands against the *right to the city* as identified by the United Nations in which “the development of cities where people of all income groups, social classes and ages can live safely, happily and in economic security is being pursued” (UN Habitat, 2016, p. 6). According to Harvey, the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources. He states that it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city and that the freedom to make and remake cities ourselves is one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (Harvey D. , 2008). The right to the city provides a powerful normative framework to support the extralegal occupation of land, unauthorized selling in public streets, squatting in abandoned buildings and idling in public places and are entangled with questions of social justice, belonging and citizenship (Murray, 2017).

However, modern urbanism and its complex dynamics make it more difficult to execute these rights established by the UN. Concepts like public governance and private governance, public space and private space and inclusion versus exclusion are subject

to bending, stretching and blurring and therefore often less clear than initially assumed. In reality, these categories are often not binary but do more justice on a scale with many grey areas, which makes related discussions and policy-making processes increasingly difficult (Kohn, 2004).

## 2.5 Public space transitions in various urban contexts

Transitions in public space are taking place in cities all over the world. In order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the transitions that are taking place in other urban contexts, this section briefly discusses on-going developments in other cities. In Mexico City, transitions in public space are taking place through the implementation of entrepreneurial urban policy. By analysing a recently implemented entrepreneurial policy called the *Programa*, Crossa explains how this policy, which aim is to revitalize and beautify Mexico Cities' Historic Centre, promotes new forms of socio-spatial exclusion among street vendors. While this policy programme seeks an improvement in quality of life for the local population, it excludes particular forms of social interaction that are central to the well-being of a large sector of the population, especially street vendors who rely on public spaces in order to maintain their livelihoods (Crossa, 2009).

In Cusco, Peru, a shift in urban policy regarding street vending has been observed from what the authors call *revanchism* to *post-revanchism*. During the *revanchist* period that lasted from 1999 to 2006, street vendors lost battles in all areas. Their voices were unheard and they faced considerable displacement since local policy was in favour of a more modern and ordered environment. The second period, the *post-revanchist* era, marked a change in which the state began to make an effort to understand and acknowledge the economic need for vendors to work on the streets of the city-centre. From then, they were allowed to work there on particular days of the week and they even were granted the right to work at previously forbidden sites, like the courtyards of old buildings. The authors are positive about further policy improvement, which shows an interesting alternative way for governments to approach the street vending industry (Mackie, Bromley, & Brown, 2014).

Street vendors are not the only user group that is being discussed in exclusion-related debates on public space. Olesen and Lassen address the privatization of public space from a mobility perspective by exploring two Australian examples of post-public spaces in the city of Melbourne. They explain how various mobility systems enable “specialized” places such as shopping centres and gated communities. They furthermore point to the fact that many post-public spaces are characterized by consumerism. This produces conflicts with the group of *non-spending public*, which are, in those cases, mostly young people. Young people are therefore not the “designated users” of these places, mostly shopping centres, and the activities in which they engage in are often seen as “anti-social” which causes numerous encounters between groups of youth and security guards. According to Olesen and Lassen, the emphasis on surveillance and the careful control over the clients in these spaces is creating issues of democracy and equity in the city (Olesen & Lassen, 2012).

Chevalier and van den Berg point to a somewhat similar phenomenon in the city of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. By outlining two spatial interventions, they investigate the classed, gendered and racial logic of a production of a post-industrial Rotterdam. They hereby point to the production of gendered Rights to the City. One spatial intervention concerns an urban planning programme that seeks to promote leisure and consumption in the city of Rotterdam, while the other is commonly referred to as a “ban on gathering”, a safety measure meant to disperse “problem groups” socializing in public. Both target groups are hereby opposites in terms of race, class and gender. The analysis shows how the focus on fun and leisure of middle class urban residents is accompanied by a repressive and criminalizing approach of young working class men of migrant descent in the context of safety policies (van den Berg & Chevalier, 2016). This is an example of how measures focused on security and consumerism affect certain often-neglected groups.

## 2.6 Research objectives and questions

The primary goal of this research is to explore and explain the differences in uses between a public space and less public space or so-called post public space in order to find out how and if this transition leads to increased exclusion of certain types of space users. It is hereby important to mention that that the categories of *public*, *semi public* and *post public* are convenient points of departure but should not be seen as fixed and only take us so far in understanding the complex dynamics that take place in urban contexts. While a lot of research has been done on public spaces, little attention has been given to post public spaces or the transition from one to another.

Increased implementation of neoliberal policies are causing transitions in the publicness of spaces worldwide and are expected to continue doing so. While many point towards the important role of public spaces in cities, little academic and political attention has been paid to transitions from public to post public spaces and the exclusion that these transitions can bring about in cities so far. It is therefore relevant to try and understand the causes and consequences of such transitions. Knowing the characteristics of a socially just space can help to create and remake more inclusive urban spaces in the future. On this basis, the following research question is posed:

*“To what extent does the transition from public to post space public in San José goes hand in hand with socio-spatial exclusion?”*

This research question is answered through several different research methods that allow triangulation. Research methods described in the toolkit for the ethnographic research of public space by the Public Space Research Group of New York University are adopted. According to the authors, it allows the discovery of the causes and dynamics of social exclusion, lack of diversity and inequality in the use and access of a public space (Low, Simpson, & Scheld, 2018). Furthermore, a policy discourse analysis is performed on three different sources that belong to actor agents of *Plaza de la Cultura* and *Parque Central*. In order to provide a well-rounded answer this question,



several sub-questions have been devised. Please note that all of these sub-questions relate specifically to the two selected case studies in the city of San José, Costa Rica.

1. *What are the physical characteristics of the spaces?*
2. *Which patterns in uses can be derived from the spaces?*
3. *Which mechanisms play a role in the publicness and accessibility of the spaces?*

The first question is employed to obtain a comprehensive description of the spaces in terms of location, facilities and design. Research shows that the design of a space can have a prominent role in steering social behaviour that takes place in spaces (Low, 2009; Gehl Institute, 2018) and that mobility systems influence processes of in- and exclusion from public spaces (Olesen & Lassen, 2012). It is therefore essential to obtain a clear view on the descriptive physical characteristics of both spaces as a first step. This section serves as a foundation in the process of answering the other sub-questions.

The second question is important in order to get a clear view on the different user groups that make use of the space. Public spaces serve as open and accessible places where people from all income groups, social classes and ages can come together. They fulfil an important role in communities' collective life (UN Habitat, 2016). Furthermore, this question looks into the different interactions that take place in these spaces. Research shows that public places promote conviviality, encounter and freedom of expression and fulfil an important role in tolerance building (Lawton, 2007; Gehl Institute, 2018). The second sub-question therefore aims to explore to which degree the different spaces fulfil those roles.

The third and last sub-question zooms in on the different mechanisms that play a role in the accessibility of a space. While the first two sub-questions are more descriptive, the third sub-question serves in order to find out why and through what cause of mechanisms certain groups make use or do not make use of a space, why interactions do or do not take place and why a space is or is not accessible for different groups. Here, data about the history and management of the spaces is addressed. In order to define the mechanisms that influence the accessibility of the two selected spaces, this research builds on the so-called "exclusionary systems" defined by Low in earlier research (Low, 2009).

The role of these mechanisms in the dynamic of exclusion of "inappropriate" space users is displayed in the conceptual model attached (Figure 2). This model illustrates the different steps in which three main drivers or impetuses (securitization, privatization and disneyfication) facilitate or generate mechanisms that lead to a decrease in accessibility and publicness of (post) public spaces. Access is hereby defined as the ability to derive benefits from public spaces (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Empirical evidence and previous research (Crossa, 2009; Olesen & Lassen, 2012; Kohn, 2004; Low, 2009; van den Berg & Chevalier, 2016) show how this decrease affects certain space users more than others, which leads to unequal potential for human life in the city.

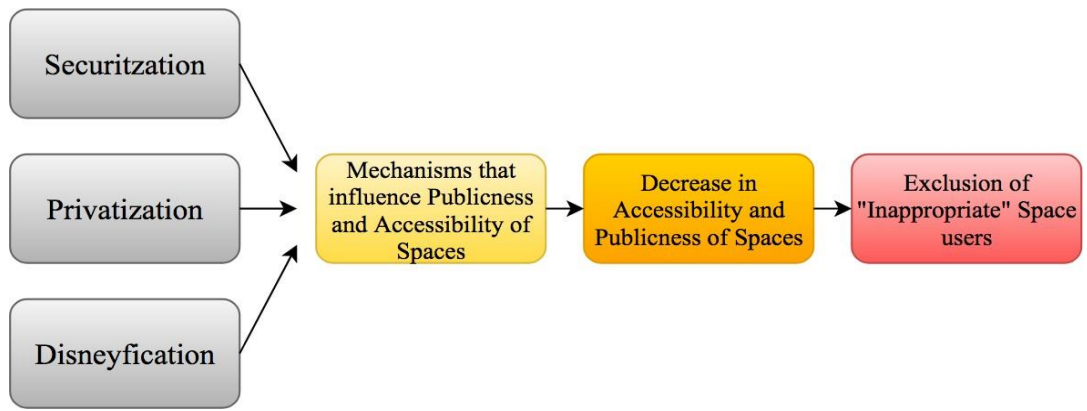


Figure 2: Conceptual model

### 3. Regional thematic framework

#### 3.1 Social inequality in Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a relatively small, upper middle-income country located between Nicaragua and Panama. Levels of economical and political stability are well above the usual levels in the Caribbean and Central American region (Gradin, 2016). However, recent trends show that inequality and crime levels are fluctuating in Costa Rica, while they are decreasing in other countries in the same region (Sandoval-Garcia, 2013; Gradin, 2016).

A quantitative research on the differential in living standards and wellbeing by race, ethnicity and country of birth in Costa Rica documents a clear divide among ethnic, racial and national lines, especially among the poor. The study explains this through lower education, a higher number of children per household and the overrepresentation of these groups in less developed areas of the country. While Costa Rica stands out for its living conditions, equality and political stability compared to other Latin American countries, these are not sufficient conditions for equality among the countries different demographic groups (Gradin, 2016).

A widespread anti-immigrant hostility exists among the Costa Ricans, which is often fed by mass media. Racialized discourses exist especially towards the Nicaraguan community. This group is often blamed for being a burden tot the Costa Rican economy and for the rise of criminality and the spread of diseases (Sandoval-Garcia, 2004). Furthermore, changes in economic policies towards an export-based economy have increased the unequal distribution of wealth. Costa Rican society is said to experience a weak public sphere and an undermining of key institutions due to the shrinking of public investments (Sandoval-Garcia, 2013).

#### 3.2 Urban inequality in Costa Rica

There has been a decline of public investments in infrastructure and public services in Costa Rica during the last two decades (Sandoval-Garcia, 2004). Certain areas in the city are said to be systematically neglected by the government. Several studies point towards the high levels of social and spatial fragmentation that exist within Costa Rica (van Noorloos, 2013, Pujol, Sanchez, & Perez, 2011, van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015). The spatial fragmentation is a reflection

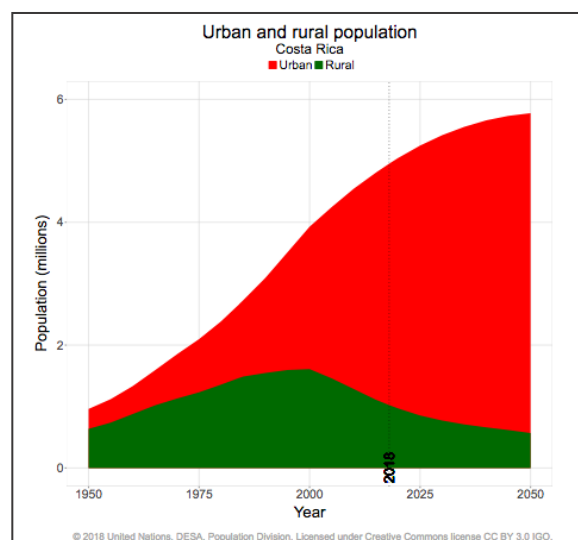


Figure 3: Urban and rural polulation in Costa Rica (United Nations, 2018)

and physical expression of the social segregation that exists within the countries' society.

The economic policy reforms that Costa Rica has experienced during the past two decades are related to increased spatial segregation. A study on spatial segregation and metro politics in Latin America show how the shift towards neoliberalism is thought to have affected patterns of spatial segregation through increased (income) inequalities, the deregulation of land markets and through the development and renewal of infrastructure (Thibert & Osorio, 2014; Ruiz & Segura, 2018). These developments classify and categorize the on-going influx of people coming to the GAM. Rapid urbanization has been going on for a while already and is expected to continue the coming years (Figure 3).

While in Costa Rica urban public life typically unfolded in and around the main quadrant of the city centre, many of the public spaces in this area have become more abandoned due to the newly established malls outside of the city centre. These places are hard to access for people whom do not own cars. The locations of these commercial centres are exclusionary in the sense that lower- and middle-class people that do not own a car can hardly reach them since most bus routes end and depart in downtown San José. The transfer of economic functions to the periphery has reinforced the abandonment of many public spaces in Costa Rica (van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015). These urban developments lead towards the establishment of a so-called post urban city (Mehaffy & Haas, 2018).

### **3.3 Public space in the greater metropolitan area (GAM)**

The GAM is the main urban area in Costa Rica. It includes the territory of 31 cantons and covers a surface of 2044 square kilometres. Around 2.6 million people live in this area. Data on the exact amount of public spaces in this area still lacks. However, a comprehensive research on the spending on public space of all cantons located in the GAM has recently been carried out by two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) named Semillas and Fuprovi (Semillas & Fuprovi, 2018). Figures 4 and 5 below picture the GAM and the percentage of spent budget on public space per canton in the GAM.

This research shows large differences between budgeted and executed spending on public space in the GAM. According to the researchers, this has to do with poor administrative management and lack of specialized human resources in local governments, since each local government is responsible for creating, investing and maintaining the public spaces within their jurisdiction. The municipalities of Cartago (10% under execution) and Belén (12% under execution) have the lowest percentages of under execution in the last five years, while the municipalities of Asseri (89% under execution) and Alajuelita (91% under execution) have the largest rates.



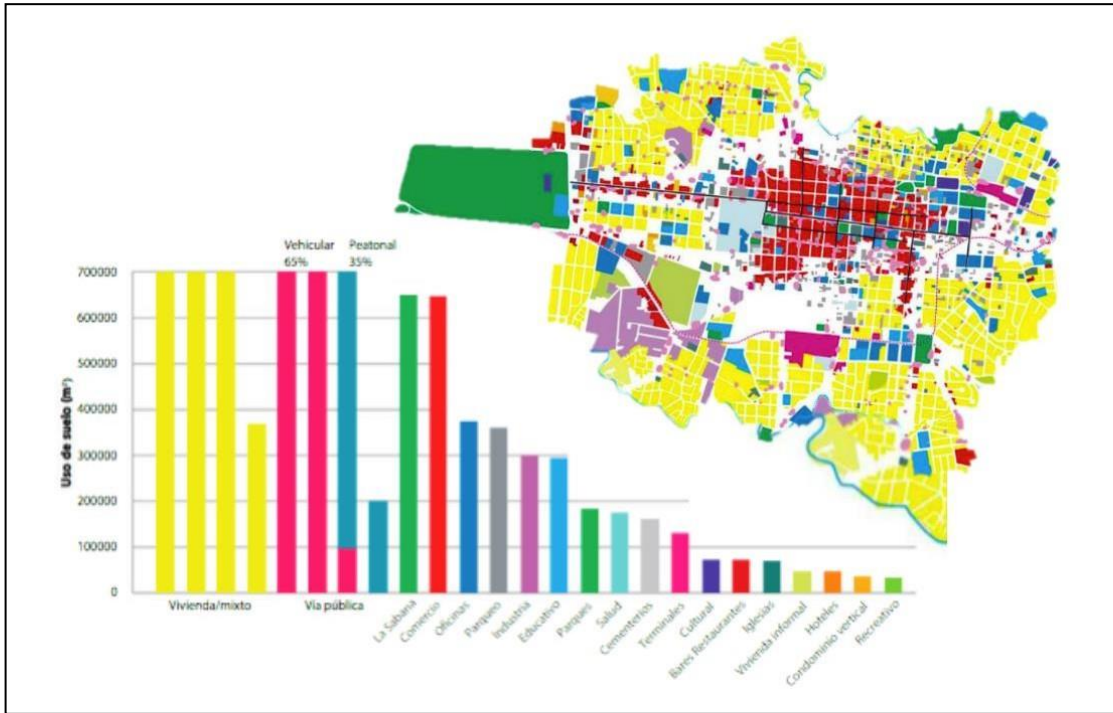


Figure 6: Surface distribution of central San José (Vargas, Chaverri, Seas, & Vuurmans, 2017)

## 4. Methodology

The research methods chosen to study the different urban spaces are vital in obtaining a comprehensive view of the selected case studies. This section starts with an explanation of the operationalization of the research questions of this research. Following this, the methods, techniques and sampling strategies are discussed. Here, the background and relevance of the toolkit for the ethnographic study of space (TESS) is explained as well as the additional method of policy discourse analysis. Furthermore, this section provides a description of the research sites.

### 4.1 Operationalization of research questions

In order to provide an answer to the main research question of this study: *“To what extent does the transition from public to post space public in San José goes hand in hand with social exclusion?”*, and to the sub-questions arising therefrom that are introduced in chapter 2, the concepts used in the sub-questions are to be operationalized. This is essential for both the data collection and data analysis phases of this research. Operationalizing the concepts of *publicness* and *accessibility* of space remains difficult since they are relatively normative. However, on the groundwork of her own experiences in research on public space in Europe, the United States and Latin America and as head of the research group of Public Space at the university of New York, Low states that a range of systems that steer in- and exclusion in space and spatial relations can be discovered when they are critically examined (Low, 2009). The operationalization of the research questions draws upon these exclusionary systems and is complemented by elements that prove to be relevant to this research.

#### 1. *What are the physical characteristics of the spaces?*

According to urban planners and sociologists, the design of infrastructures and the built environment are able to reinforce or challenge existing patterns of inclusion or exclusion. Spaces can structure interaction, which can mitigate or intensify ingrained social dynamics. If properly designed public spaces are able to foster solidarity between people. The following physical characteristics are taken into account in this regard:

- Physical enclosure - that limits who can enter or exit, such as fenced and gated spaces
- Aesthetic restrictions - that symbolically communicate who is welcomed or excluded through high-end designs or elite renovation or parks, public markets, and buildings as well as defensive designs that deter particular behaviors
- Discursive features - such as signs and media commentary that identify either the kinds of behaviors or the types of people who should be allowed in a space
- Available facilities - that prioritize certain user groups over others or symbolically represent certain user groups over others

- Surrounding mobility system - that produces or reproduces existing patterns of stratification or exclusion

## 2. *Which patterns in uses can be derived from the spaces?*

In order to explore whether public spaces either stimulate the exclusion of certain groups or stimulate the representation of diversity, it is important to find out how the public spaces are used and by whom. The interactions between users are of relevance since research how interactions in spaces can foster tolerance and sense of community (Kohn, 2004; Lawton, 2007). The following indicators are applied in this regard:

- User groups - these groups can range from skateboarders, sunbathers, artists, children, dog walkers, the police to the police or street vendors, these groups are thus defined based on their behaviour at the time of data collection
- User activities - activities can range from selling, reading, sunbathing and skateboarding to waiting, walking and making music
- User interactions - this entails information about the degree to which different user groups and individuals within user groups are in contact with each other

## 3. *Which mechanisms play a role in the accessibility of the spaces?*

Next to the physical characteristics of public spaces, other political and financial factors prove to play a role in the accessibility and publicness of spaces (Low, 2009). The following mechanisms are hereby taken into account:

- Surveillance strategies - such as policing, private security, and "city ambassadors," and webcam and video cameras that discourage certain people from entering the space because of racial profiling
- Privatization of property - especially areas that surround public spaces and deny public access
- Financial requirements - such as the price or ability to pay that limit entrance to malls or private housing schemes
- Legal and governance instruments - that restrict entrance and use
- Political decisions - about what is built or not built, such as public housing or a stadium in a downtown area

## 4.2 Methods, techniques and sampling strategies

### *Toolkit for the Ethnographic Study of Space (TESS)*

The Public Space Research Group at the university of New York has developed a toolkit for the ethnographic study of space (TESS). This toolkit is a set of in-depth qualitative research methods for studying the everyday life of a particular public space. The methods are adapted from previous research on public space in Central America and



the United States. According to the authors, it allows the discovery of the causes and dynamics of social exclusion, lack of diversity, and inequality in the use and access of a public space. The goal of a TESS study is to work towards the creation of a socially just space for all community groups and members (Low, Simpson, & Scheld, 2018, p. 3).

The TESS study consists of several steps, from which the first one is writing field notes in the form of scratch notes, field notes, and memos. It is hereby important to separate observations from personal feelings. The second step is mapping, this is a way to record people and objects and their relations to one another in public space. In this step, behavioural maps, movement maps and physical trace maps of a certain space are established. Hereby, photographic and video recording can be used.

The third step is participant observation. In this step, the cultural rules, practices and beliefs of a certain space can be learned. In the fourth step, people are asked about their experiences with a space through interviews. This is a crucial step in developing conclusions about the meaning, uses and functions of a particular space. The last step in data gathering is documenting the history of a particular space in order to gain insights into underlying inequalities, conflicts and struggles for recognition (Low, Simpson, & Scheld, 2018).

TESS can be described as a useful tool in evaluating a space since it highlights what conflicts or opportunities may exist in a way that does not assume the researcher already knows what they might be. This approach encourages learning what was not already known and allows the confirmation of whether previous ideas are in fact correct. This is an important aspect in this research, since it may be easy to have prejudices about the characteristics of public and post public spaces (Low, Simpson, & Scheld, 2018). Another important aspect of this method is the comparison of different methods, or triangulation. This process allows the researcher to use different tools (mapping, observing, photographing, interviewing and documenting history) and produce different understandings of the space to ultimately bring them together in an inclusive description (Low, Simpson, & Scheld, 2018).

### *Policy discourse analysis*

As an addition to the previously mentioned research methods, a policy discourse analysis is carried out on several different contents in order to obtain a comprehensive view on the existing legal discourses regarding public space in San José. Previous research shows how different actors compete for the control of public space in the context of hybrid forms of governance. This phenomenon is closely examined by the performance of a policy discourse analysis on textual content that is produced by three different agents that play a role in *Parque Central* or *Plaza de la Cultura*, namely the Central Bank of Costa Rica (BCCR), Municipal policy makers and the Municipal police.

Posts from the Facebook page of the local police called *Policía Municipal de San José* ([www.facebook.com/pg/lapoliciaadelacapital/posts](http://www.facebook.com/pg/lapoliciaadelacapital/posts)) that concern either *Parque Central* or *Plaza de la Cultura* within the years 2017 until 2020 up to and including April are analysed. Selection is hereby based on a search within the page on

the terms “Plaza de la Cultura” and “Parque Central”. Posts often include both written text and corresponding photos. All pictures of the Municipal Facebook page that are portrayed within this study thus correspond to an analysed post. Furthermore, the municipal development plan for San José concerning the years 2017 up to and including 2020 is analysed (Municipalidad de San José , 2017), as well as the existing policy document that the BCCR created for the use of Plaza de la Cultura (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018).

While policy can be described as a research agenda in its own right, valuable lessons can be learned from analysing the use of language in policy documents. Discourse unveils and (re)constructs existing power relations between different actors. An analysis of the latter thus aims to expose patterns and hidden rules of how language is used and how narratives are created. According to Foucault, policy making is not a rational process based on incontrovertible evidence. He states that evidence or information used in policy making is created within the confines of discursive formations, so that the “truth” conforms to the rules and norms of the discourse (Hewitt, 2009). This method thus aims to expose how power relations that influence public space are displayed and explained in policy discourse.

Since discourse analysis is a qualitative method, the reliability and validity cannot be ascertained in the same way as in quantitative approaches. In order to still perform the analysis in a reliable way, a set of operationalization questions is constructed and applied on all three different documents. These questions aim to reveal and clarify the interests and vision of the writer, the target group of the document, the different rhetorical techniques used to transfer the writers’ goals to the target group, emphasized and underexposed issues, the use of loaded words, metaphors or sayings that are used to construct arguments, the overall discourse that comes forward in the document and how real life outcomes can be explained based on the overall discourse of the analysed material. The following operationalization question have been established:

- What are the interests of the writers? What is their vision?
- Who is the target group of the analysed material?
- Which rhetorical techniques are used in or transfer the goals and interests to the target group?
- What themes are dealt with? Which issues are emphasized and which are underexposed?
- Which loaded words/metaphors/sayings are used and how do these help to construct certain arguments?
- What is the overall discourse that comes forward in the analysed material?

### *Sampling*

Previous research points to the fact that the division between public space and post public space or pseudo public space remains unclear and indefinite (Kohn, 2004), this research performs a TESS study on two different urban spaces in San José, namely

*Plaza de la Cultura* and *Parque Central*. In order to be able to compare the different sites in terms of user patterns, accessibility and publicness, the sites are located in the same central area. This helps to reduce bias in comparing the different places. Mechanisms of in- and exclusion, accessibility, interactions and other uses of the spaces are mapped through a comparative study.

### 4.3 Description of research sites

#### *Parque Central*

*Parque Central* is located in the city centre of San José. The site consists mainly of paved grounds with relatively few green spaces and therefore shares more characteristics of a square instead of a park. *Parque Central* was designed by Spanish colonists as the ceremonial and civic centre of the growing town called La Villa Nueva del Señor San José. It served as a weekend marketplace and religious and civic institutions quickly surrounded it. As research on Spanish colonial towns shows, the plan and urban design of squares was a central part in the establishment of the Spanish American Colonial Empire. It represents and defines how territory was reorganized under the political and administrative authority of urban power (Low, 1996; Lefebvre, The production of space, 1991).

Since then, *Parque Central* has been redesigned several times. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the plaza was refurbished with elements that characterize European Bourgeois. These elements are still visible today, for example in the fountain and street lightning in Victorian style (Low, 1996). This is further discussed in the historical analysis. Today, the *Parque Central* is surrounded by both local and international shops and restaurants as well as by the Cathedral Metropolitana de San José and the Teatro Popular Melico Salazar. The surrounding streets consist of a lot of traffic, which makes the place noisy and busy.

#### *Plaza de la Cultura*

The second case study, *Plaza de la Cultura*, is less old and more modern than the previous discussed case. The square is located only two blocks away from *Parque Central* and can be described as a paved square with futurist design characteristics of the Pompidou Centre located in Paris, especially because of the industrial looking pipes. While the place can be described as a square, it actually also forms the roof of the subterranean Gold Museum and the Costa Rican tourism office which are located right underneath the plaza.

The museum was originally created as a celebration of indigenous Costa Rican culture and came into being together with the *plaza* in the year 1982. Three male architects who had won a design competition for the new Gold museum design the place. Low had the chance to interview the architects during her fieldwork in San José in 1979. She describes the architects' views as best appreciated from a male point of view. One of them imagined the plaza as a place in which men could watch women passing by with a long sightline available. The second one mostly saw the plaza as a

meeting place for men. The third architect mostly wanted an open space for public performances (Low, 1996).

When the plaza first opened, the local Costa Ricans neither welcomed nor understood the place. Spontaneous demonstrations and destructions showed the discontent of the local inhabitants (Low, 1996). The plaza is nowadays surrounded by the Teatro Nacional de Costa Rica, the Gran Hotel Costa Rica by Hilton, banks and many other international known shops and restaurants like McDonald's, Starbucks and Taco Bell. The surrounding streets are for pedestrians only, which makes the place quieter than *Parque Central*.

#### 4.4 Critical reflection

In doing qualitative research, it is important to stay aware of your position as a researcher and the impact that this position can have on data collection in the field, especially in foreign contexts. In this research, this impact of me being a young, white, female student, can come forward during several different stages. My presence in the spaces can influence the way in which other individuals behave. It is therefore important to try to blend in as much as possible during observation. The interviews can also be influenced by my positionality, for example through cultural or linguistic misunderstandings. Hence, it is important to stay aware of the different positions of all stakeholders involved in the research and the perspectives that accompany these positions, including my own.

One limitation of this research has to do with the fact that a limited amount of time that has been spent in the field in order to collect data. While the original research plan was to stay in the field for three months, only six weeks were fulfilled due to the covid-19 outbreak. A longer period would have allowed a richer collection of field data. The shortened period of fieldwork has also affected the implementation of research methods. The reduced amount of time spent in the field has reduced the ethnographic character of this research due to the fact that the TESS method was implemented only to a limited extent. Although all steps of the TESS study have been applied, they have been implemented for less longer periods of time.

Furthermore, the changed circumstances have made it difficult ~~in order~~ to establish this study in the form of a co-creation. The initial plan aimed to shape this research as much as possible in a way in which information is not only extracted from the host community, but in a co-constructive way in which different actors work together in order to arrive at a mutually supportive and beneficial whole for various stakeholders. The shortened period of time in the field has made it difficult in order to establish such constructive ties. However, contact is maintained with the local NGO Semillas, which works together with the NGO Fuprovi. This thesis will be shared with these parties in the hope that they will have some benefit from it.

Another limitation has to do with the fact that two specific sites are investigated in this research. While this allows a thorough investigation and elaboration on the selected spaces and therefore also adds to the quality of the research, it is important to note that generalizations to other contexts or spaces is only possible to a limited extent,

especially because all public spaces and their contexts are different and unique. Other limitations in this research include the fact that most concepts in the conceptual model are relatively normative and open for interpretation. In order to limit a possible researcher bias, it is aimed to maintain an objective view and to use tangible demonstrations of these elements in the findings. For all of the mentioned reasons, it would be incorrect to state that these restrictions did not affect the overall study.

## 5. The perceived, lived and planned dimensions of *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*

This chapter elaborates on several different characteristics of both cases, *Plaza de la Cultura* and *Parque Central*. These characteristics are essential to understand in order to be able to answer the main research question. First of all, a historical analysis provides understanding about the social contestation and conflicts between regular users of the spaces and agents of the spaces. Insight in the history of the cases allows a better understanding of current circumstances and perceptions. Secondly, the facilities, aesthetic restrictions, discursive features and the surrounding mobility system are discussed as physical characteristics of the spaces. This section covers the *planned* dimension. Lastly, a description of the user groups, user activities and user interactions is presented in order to provide a comprehensive view on the user patterns and therefore on the *lived* dimension of the spaces.

### 5.1 Historical Analysis

When investigating a physical space, it is important to note how urban spaces are socially constructed, both symbolically and materially. *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura* differ greatly in terms of physical characteristics and user patterns. In order to fully grasp the notion of these spaces, it is highly relevant to compare the degree of social contestation and conflict between the regular users of the spaces and the agents of the space, in this case, the municipal government and the BCCR now and in the past. In order to comprehensively understand the roles of both spaces in the context of the city and to grasp the *perceived* dimension of both spaces, a historical analysis is conducted and presented in this section.

#### 5.1.1 *Parque Central*

*Parque Central* was designed by Spanish colonists in 1751 as the ceremonial and civic centre of the growing town of San José. In its early days it served as a weekend marketplace. Religious and civic institutions quickly began to surround it. The design and creation of *Parque Central* is an example of how Spanish American colonial authorities exercise administrative and political power through urban social spaces. Setha Low explains that while Spanish American *plazas* can be seen as consciously produced means of social domination and control, they are a product of both Spanish American and indigenous history since the original physical shape of *plazas* also derived from indigenous forms of political and social control. Some of the first Spanish American *plazas* were actually build on the ruins of the indigenous *plazas* and both were essentially produced to display military conquest and market domination by the rulers in place (Low, 1996).

The parks' physical form and social functions remained the same until halfway the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the park was redesigned and filled with several European bourgeois-style facilities. The wooden "Victorian" kiosk was constructed in 1890. Around this time, the park was presumably a space where elite groups would gather

and socialize. In 1944, a large cement kiosk that was donated by a Nicaraguan industrialist replaced the older “Victorian” style kiosk (Image 1). However, in 1992, a group of San José citizens revolted with the idea to restore the kiosk to its original appearance. According to this group, the cement kiosk did not accurately represent Josefinos’ idea of what appropriate architecture for the civic centre of the city looked like. This taste-based request can be seen as architectural metaphor for broader class-based differences that existed and still exist within the local society (Low, 1996).

The group of revolting citizens did not get their way and the cement kiosk is still visible in the central part of the park today. San José’s society and urban life have changed significantly over time. Since the 1950s, economic changes increased urban density as well as pollution and crime in the city centre. Most upper-class families have long left the city centre for rich suburbs like barrio Escalante. These processes intensified with the coming of large suburban malls that further reduced social functions of the city centre. These developments changed urban life and thus life in *Parque Central* and made room for working class people. Elite symbols have now been replaced by externalities that symbolize globalized economy like international banks and eateries, a process that is also known as *McDonaldization* (Ritzer, 1993).



Image 1: *Parque Central* through the years - top left to bottom right respectively: 1930, 1960, 1990, 2010 (Fotos Antiguas Costa Rica Facebook Page, 2020)

In 2008, a pedestrian walkway called *Paseo Unión Europea*, which crosses right through the city centre and along *Parque Central*, was created. According to the municipality, it was built in order to create more space for pedestrians and as a place where people could come together in order to enjoy culture and art (Segura, 2012). The construction of this boulevard brought the inauguration of a security camera system with it. At the time, seven security cameras were placed along the boulevard, of which

one at the corner of *Parque Central*. This moment marks the start of a period in which more and more security forces have entered the park and the city.

This form of authoritarian control is in line with the original motivation for the establishment of the park by colonial powers. Despite the changes, the park is still linked to the traditional past. Halfway the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the societal and economic changes concerned Josefinos. The predominance of lower-class occupants and the increase in crime caused many of them to bemoan the loss of the traditionalism of the upper-class. However, nostalgia for traditional values was accompanied by a desire for modernity. These societal perceptions led to the building of a new plaza, one that preserves the culture of the past in a modern, Costa Rican form; *Plaza de la Cultura* (Low, 1996).

### 5.1.2 *Plaza de la Cultura*

While the historical story of *Plaza de la Cultura* is much shorter compared to *Parque Centrales*, it is not necessarily less contested. The project was born in 1973, right after the theatre building was declared a national monument and the surrounding area was declared public interest (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018). The construction process of the plaza lasted six years and was completed in 1982. Different actors had different motives for the creation of the plaza. The Minister of Planning was concerned about the development of the city centre and wanted to revitalize the downtown area while the head of the Central Bank was mainly interested in creating a new home for the banks' pre-Columbian gold collection. The head of the then newly created Ministry of Culture, Sports and Recreation wanted to create a downtown place where Costa Ricans of all layers of society could enjoy themselves (Low, 1997; Azofeifa, 2014).

The initial plan was to use the ground next to the National Theatre to build a museum for the Central Banks' gold collection. The bank therefore acquired the land and a design competition was held to decide which architect should lead the construction of the new museum. The "Liberationists", a progressive political party in power at the time that stood for a politically liberal coalition of professional, middle-class and working-class Costa Ricans, supported the plan. The liberationists were interested in giving all Costa Ricans a physical space that would represent indigenous values and cater all classes (Low, 1997).

Jorge Bertheau, Jorge Borbon and Edgar Vargas won the competition and started working on their designs for the museum. However, the architectural plans were turned around when the head of the Ministry of Culture saw the site cleared for the first time and insisted that the museum was going to be built underground in order to preserve the open view of the National Theatre. He then convinced the head of the Central Bank and President Oduber, which led to the creation of Plaza de La Cultura. While the government took responsibility for the administration of the plaza in the beginning, this quickly changed when the Central Bank took over the financing and execution of the plaza two years later for unknown reasons (Museos Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018).



According to the gold museum's website, the visitor is the protagonist on the plaza, because he or she is the one who gives meaning to the space when using it. They state that the space has become vital with powerful symbolic values, which have given it the character of the heart of the city (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018). Despite this embracing statement, local josefinos did not embrace the plaza from the start. The first day after its opening, locals lit fires in the trashcans, broke the fountain and the lights and pulled out plants. During the years between 1982 and 1985, the problems in and around the plaza increased. It became a typical spot for drug users and prostitutes. This led the Gran Hotel located at the plaza to hire a bouncer and a special police guard was placed at the National Theatre (Low, 1997).

After a few years, around 1986, conditions quieted down at the plaza and locals started using the place more. Low describes how tourists walked around the stalls where vendors sold pre-Columbian crafts and goods. Students sat under the trees reading books or waiting for friends. North Americans congregated under one of the two tree planters and teenagers and young adults hung out around the fountain. Low reported to rarely see any illegal activities during her fieldwork at the plaza (Low, 1996). The plaza seemed to have found its balance and social role in the city centre of San Jose. However, in 2018, the plaza was renovated due to the tearing and breaking of the concrete floor and the leaking of the surface caused by the infiltration of rainwater. According to the executive director of the Museums of the Central Bank (MBCCR), Virginia Vargas, the conservation project focused on three axes: accessibility, enjoyment of the urban space and conservation (La Nacion, 2016).

As part of the project, the concrete floor got replaced with a porcelain-like surface (Image 2), a higher quality material according to the architect of the Central Bank, Rafael Marin. In addition, three new ramps were placed that include signage for blind people. Marin stressed that the renovation seeks to recover the spirit of the original design; therefore the fountain that functioned on the northwest side was reconstructed. The architect pointed out that the aim is to provide passers-by with an urban element for enjoyment: *"it is a passable fountain designed so that people, especially children, can play in the water"* (La Nacion, 2016). The total costs of the conservation project amounted to \$3 million colones and were covered by the Central Bank.

While the conservation project claimed to focus on accessibility and enjoyment, the renovation of the plaza also entailed the inauguration of new restrictions. Three panels entered the space on which an extensive exposition of rules and guidelines is visible. It includes statements that discourage children from entering the fountain in order to prevent the violation of their integrity and to prevent them from becoming sick. This contests the statement of the architect that refers to the fountain as an urban element for enjoyment. Additionally, all benches and trees (apart from one) were removed during the renovation and two permanent guards were placed on the plaza by the Central Bank. During an interview<sup>1</sup> with these guards, they stated that the benches

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, street interview with BCCR security guard at Plaza de la Cultura, 13/03/2020

were removed because people would gather around them and this was harder to control for them<sup>2</sup>.

The symbolism of the plaza represents Costa Rican society and culture in a way that is far different or even opposite from the initial motivations of the Liberationists. The plaza is now characterized by global consumer culture and modernism. What was once meant to be a representation of indigenous values has now become a reflection North American culture and capitalist symbols. The expensive National Theatre and hotel that are located at the plaza mainly attract rich North-American and European tourists and the museum exhibits European and North American art due to a new contract between the museum and the Spanish ministry of Culture (Ministerio de Educacion, Cultura y Deporte España, 2017).

At one point, street vendors were only allowed to sell artisanal or indigenous looking products at the plaza<sup>3</sup>, which illustrates how a celebration of indigenous culture turned into a marketable and tourist-centered place quickly. Furthermore, the plaza is currently surrounded by an I-store, a McDonalds, a Starbucks, a European language academy, Scotiabank and Taco Bell, leaving little room for local eateries and businesses. These symbolic cultural expressions show how local culture becomes characterized by global consumer culture and how global forces and top-down processes decrease the legitimacy of governments and thereby shape urban landscapes.



Image 2: Upper two images show *Plaza de la Cultura* before the renovation of 2016, lower two images show the current state of the *plaza*

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication, street interview with BCCR security guard at Plaza de la Cultura, 13/03/2020

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication, Zoom interview with Setha Low, 29/04/2020

## 5.2 Physical characteristics

In order to provide a comprehensive view of the physical characteristics of the two selected case studies, *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*, this section narrates the different physical aspects that have been identified in both spaces during the fieldwork period. The physical characteristics are relevant since they are believed to play a role or influence in some way the publicness or the accessibility of public spaces (Low, 2009; Kohn, 2004; Gehl Institute, 2018). Furthermore, the physical characteristics form the *planned* dimension of Lefebvre's' conceptual triad of the production of space. Explanations of how and why physical characteristics influence the publicness and accessibility of the spaces are provided by means of empirical examples.

### 5.2.1 Facilities

The differences between the available facilities of the two spaces are significant. *Parque Central* can be described as a small but diverse park. It consists of different areas and corners with small elevation differences. This provides different ways of being in the park. There are numerous concrete benches of approximately 1.2 meters wide. The park also consists of street lanterns and a fountain, both in Art-Nouveau style. Furthermore, the park is a relatively green space. While the variety of plant species is not that large, there are enough trees to provide shade during the hot dry-season months. The centrally located cement kiosk is the most characterizing facility of the space.

The available facilities on *Plaza de la Cultura* are sparse compared to *Parque Central*. The largest part of the square can be described as a flat and empty space. There are no benches to rest on and no trees to provide shade. On the Eastern side of the plaza, there is a small stairs that leads to the museum located under the plaza. In this part, several text panels can be found that provide information about the museum, exhibitions and the history of the *plaza*.

The absence of sitting places and shade presumably prevents different user groups from enjoying the plaza. For example, the *plaza* is easily accessible for people with mobility impairments due to the ramps that have been placed. However, once the plaza has been entered, the lack of seating facilities make it difficult to engage in any activity apart from crossing the *plaza* to go someplace else where



Image 3: *Parque Central* (personal picture, 2020)



Image 4: *Plaza de la Cultura* (personal picture, 2020)

shade and seats are provided. This gives the space a hollow character; it has turned into a transit-area.

### 5.2.2 Aesthetic restrictions

Aesthetic restrictions can symbolically communicate who is welcomed or excluded through high-end designs or elite renovations as well as defensive designs that deter particular behaviours (Low, 2009). In both cases, aesthetic restrictions seem to have come forward and play a role in the publicness of the spaces through urban renewal projects. As mentioned earlier, *Plaza de la Cultura* has been renovated three years ago. This led to several profound changes, both aesthetically and in terms of use. At *Parque Central*, the construction of a new pedestrian zone has influenced the publicness of the park.

While *Plaza de la Cultura* has always been a relatively open space, the removal of the benches, trees and planters have caused total visibility throughout the *plaza*, which makes control easier for the BCCR security guards whom are present on different corners of the *plaza* since the renovation. According to the guards, the *plaza* is easier to control these days. They also expressed the wish to fully fence the *plaza* in order to control who enters the area<sup>4</sup>. According to them, the bank is already allowed to do that, which contrasts with the fact that the surroundings of the National Theatre were declared public interest in 1973 (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018).



Image 5: *Plaza de la Cultura* (personal picture, 2020)



Image 6: *Plaza de la Cultura* (personal picture, 2020).

The newly laid surface at the *plaza* exudes a clean and modern image (Image 7). This surface is mopped several times a day to keep it clean and to get rid of pigeon droppings (Image 8). These aspects ensure a sleek and high-end look and fit the “cleaning-up the city” image of modern and smart cities (Harvey, Kihato, & Skinner,

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication, street interview with BCCR security guard at Plaza de la Cultura, 13/02/2020

2018). The lack of spatial diversity and facilities and the inviolable and high-class exterior and character of the space are not very inviting to users, apart from the tourists crossing the *plaza* to move between the high-end hotel, the national theatre, and the gold museum that are all located at different sides of the *plaza*. The lack of diversity in the space is reflected in the lack of diversity in user patterns, which is further discussed in the section on the use of the spaces.



Image 7: Security camera footage of public spaces in San José with *Plaza de la Cultura* top right and *Parque Central* bottom right (Municipal police San José Facebook page, 2020).



Image 8: *El Paseo Unión Europea* (personal picture, 2020).

Because of the lack of pedestrian walkways in the city centre of San José, the government has invested in several pedestrian zones in the downtown area. One of these zones, named *el Paseo Unión Europea*, inaugurated in 2008, passes by the North side of *Parque Central* (Image 9). Initially, the boulevard was meant to be filled with culture and art, a place where people could go to in order to socialize and to enjoy themselves (Segura, 2012). The idea was that this would attract future investors, making it an effective urban renewal project. The project required a lot of restructuring actions; sixteen blocks in Avenue 4 were repositioned in order to make place for the 1200 meters of paved carpet (Segura, 2012).

In order to control and protect this newly created boulevard, its construction was accompanied by the inauguration of a new visual vigilance force; seven security cameras were placed along the boulevard (Image 10). The municipal police control these cameras through a computer system, which grants them with systematic strategies of control and subordination of “inappropriate” users. Since 2008, over 200 security cameras have entered the city centre (Segura, 2012). The design of the high-end boulevard came with the arrival of a new monitoring system that gave the police direct supervision over the use of the pedestrian zone and its immediate surroundings. This enables them to control who uses the area and in what way and reduces the public nature of the space.

### 5.2.3 Discursive features

As has been determined in earlier work, discursive features such as signs can identify either the kinds of behaviours or the types of people who should be allowed in a space (Low, 2009; Kohn, 2004). This argument is acknowledged in the field of environmental psychology (Di Masso, 2012; Németh, 2009). On the *Plaza de la Cultura*, discursive features that identify the allowed types of behaviour are distinctly present. Four two-sided panels (Images 9 and 10) provided by BCCR ensure a clear explanation of the so-called “recommendations and guidelines” for the use of this urban space. The panels have been placed three years ago, right after the renovation of the *plaza*. The following recommendations and guidelines can be read on the panels:

General guidelines of the *plaza* (originally in Spanish):

- It is forbidden to feed the pigeons in all the area covered by the Plaza de la Cultura project (including the entrance to the museums), therefore, it is also forbidden to sell corn or any other type of food for pigeons.
- Any event or audio-visual production for commercial purposes must have the prior authorization of the central bank's museum foundation.
- The handrails in the stands and the ramps on the stairs for people with reduced capacity must remain free of obstacles. Therefore, it is not allowed to sit on the stairs.
- It is not permitted to climb, run or jump on elevated walkways and stone benches.
- The use of skates, skateboards or bicycles on the square is prohibited, to avoid affecting pedestrians.
- It is forbidden to drink alcohol or to carry any type of weapon.
- The Plaza de la Cultura is a smoke-free area, it is therefore forbidden to smoke.
- Any type of irregular behaviour of persons that can harm the security of others, especially children, must be indicated to the security guards.

Guidelines and recommendations of the use of the *plaza* (originally in Spanish):

- The trespassing of any kind of vehicle is forbidden.
- Street vending of all kinds is forbidden.
- Pursuant to Sanitary Order RCS-ARS-SEM-MTA-239-2015, feeding pigeons or any other bird is not allowed.
- Eating and drinking at the water stream is not allowed.
- People under age without the surveillance of their parents (or tutors) are not allowed at the water stream. Mascots are not permitted at the water stream at any time.
- We recommend the quick use of the water stream, to prevent children from getting sick.
- To ensure children's integrity, please do not let them get into the water stream in bathing suits or dress/undress them in public.
- Even though the fountain consists of a filtering system and the right dose of substances to keep the water clean, the water should not be drunk.
- Any type of irregular behaviour of persons that could risk the security of others must be reported to the security guards immediately, especially if it concerns minors.
- The security officials may invite users who harm the electromechanical system of the fountain to leave the square.

Guidelines and recommendations concerning the enjoyment of the *plaza* (originally in English):

- It is forbidden to take food or drinks into the fountain.
- The entry of children into the fountain without supervises of their parents or a caretaker is forbidden, the entry of mascots into the fountain is also forbidden.
- It is recommended to only use the fountain shortly, in order to ensure the health of the children.
- To ensure the integrity of the children, it is recommended to not let children enter the fountain in swimwear, nor their dressing and undressing in public.
- Even though the fountain consists of a filtering system and the right dose of substances to keep the water clean, the water should not be drunk.
- Any type of irregular behaviour of persons that could risk the security of others must be reported to the security guards immediately, especially if it concerns minors.
- The security officials may invite users who harm the electromechanical system of the fountain to leave the square.



Image 9: User guidelines at the *Plaza de la Cultura*



Image 10: User guidelines at the *Plaza de la Cultura*

While some of these recommendations and guidelines are more straightforward than others, such as banning the carrying of weapons, it is rather unusual to display them in such detail in the space. The fact that this urban space comes with a user manual does affect the publicness and the accessibility of the space. The statement considering the prohibition of audio-visual production for commercial purposes also applies to street musicians and artists who place their hat on the ground in order to catch a few coins<sup>5</sup>. This complicates maintaining a livelihood in such a manner and excludes these user groups from the space. A repression of cultural expressions can be described as contradictory on a square that is called *Plaza de la Cultura*.

The displayed user recommendations and guidelines thoroughly restrict spontaneous actions and interactions in the space. This is lamentable, since spontaneity

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication, street interview with BCCR security guard at Plaza de la Cultura, 13/03/2020

is one of the building factors of social cohesion in public spaces according to the Gehl Institute (Gehl Institute, 2018). The restrictions considering the spontaneous use of the space impacts the public character or publicness of this urban space. The fact that all kinds of street vending are prohibited is linked to a decrease in accessibility of the *plaza*. The two security guards whom are present at the plaza for the largest part of the day monitor peoples' compliance with the displayed rules.

On one of the panels, the Central Bank shortly explains its authority over the plaza by stating the following: “*This private space is open to the public since its inauguration in 1982, by means of article 10 of the act, therefore, any activity carried out in the plaza is authorized and regulated by the Foundation to manage the Museums of the Central Bank of Costa Rica, which also has security 24 hours a day, 7 days a week*”<sup>6</sup>. In this statement, the Central Bank clearly communicates their ownership towards the public, something that they previously, before the renovation in 2016, did not do. It is hereby relevant to mention that the so-called Foundation to manage the Museums of the Central Bank of Costa Rica was created in 1993 as a private entity.

It is thus important to note that while the *plaza* was always open for the public and in ownership of the Central Bank since its inauguration in 1982, the private foundation that now manages and regulates the *plaza* was created in 1993. All of this information can be found in the legal documents that the Central Bank or the Foundation provide on the website of the gold museum. In this document, article 2 of the Act establishing the Foundation, No. 7363 establishes the Foundation as a private entity and Article 3 of the previously mentioned law establishes that the Foundation may generate sources of financing to fulfil its aims and objectives (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018). It thus seems as if the creation of the Foundation as a private entity has allowed the Central Bank to provide new rules that restrict and commodify the use of the space. This topic is further discussed in the section on privatization.

#### **5.2.4 Surrounding mobility system**

Olesen and Lassen point to the fact that only few studies have approached the trend of privatization of public space in the contemporary city through a mobility perspective. However, they state that many mobility systems not only create new opportunities for urban life but also serve as one of the most critical components in the production of new exclusion and stratification (Olesen & Lassen, 2012). The current mobility system in San José is causing problems in the central parts of the city. Long traffic jams are a daily reality and the yearly number of traffic accidents is high. A research by the architectural department of the University of Costa Rica shows how the mobility system is now characterized by *carrocentrismo* (car-centrism), leaving little space for cyclists and pedestrians. While many bus routes end and depart in downtown San José, which makes both case studies accessible in terms of location, the impact of car-centrism on *Parque Central* and *plaza de la Cultura* is noticeable.

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<sup>6</sup> User guidelines and regulations panel located at Plaza de la Cultura, provided by the BCCR



*Parque Central* is located directly next to two busy roads on the South and the West side of the park. This affects the park since the smell of exhaust emissions and the noise produced by the cars is clearly noticeable in the park. *Plaza de la Cultura* is directly located next to one road, on the East side of the square. This makes the place more quiet compared to *Parque Central*, which is located next to two busy roads. However, what influences the accessibility of the spaces more is the fact that public spaces are now fragmented since they are separated by busy roads with few pedestrian crossings whose traffic lights do not often turn green. Image 11 shows how taxi's form a physical barrier around *Parque Central*. The car-centric character of the city centre is also noticeable in the absence of efficient mobility alternatives. Many of the pavements in the city are relatively narrow and in poor condition, which causes obstruction problems and annoyances among users. These annoyances are often uttered towards street vendors, who are blamed for causing the obstruction problems on sidewalks in the city centre.

Despite the efforts of the government by the construction of pedestrian zones, little change in the car-centric character of the city can be observed so far. This has to do with the fact that the *carrocentrismo* is maintained through cultural and social values; it is the dominant socio-technical mobility system and thus embedded in society (Image 12). Next to it being a status symbol, driving a car is widely associated with safety in Costa Rica. A BCCR security guard mentioned how they are mainly guarding the *plaza* in order to ensure the safety of the tourists since locals have their own cars and are therefore less vulnerable<sup>7</sup>. This information shows how both the aspects of societal fear of “the other” and the mobility system influence each other and the accessibility and publicness of public spaces in the city of San José. This topic is further discussed in the section on securitization.

According to Sandercock, “the fear of the other” in cities can be a way of keeping out the people who “are not like us” and exacerbates social polarization (Sandercock, 2003). This stimulates people who can afford it to retreat to their privatized spaces (Olesen & Lassen, 2012). Public spaces should be considered and treated as networks instead of separate islands within a city. This stimulates inclusion and equity (Gehl Institute, 2018). One could argue that the openness of *Plaza de la Cultura* adds to connectiveness of public spaces throughout the centre of San José due to its open character, which would be true if more people made use of the space. The lack of equity in San José's mobility system therefore impedes the inclusion and accessibility of public spaces in the downtown area, such as *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*.

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<sup>7</sup> Personal communication, street interview with BCCR security guard, 13/03/2020

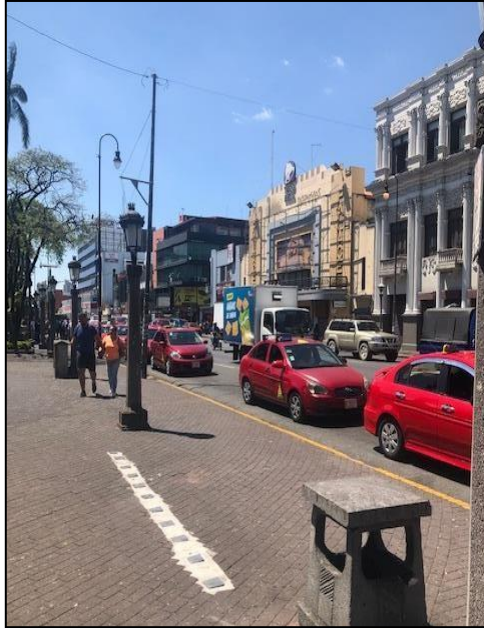


Image 11: Physical enclosure of *Parque Central* by cars (personal picture, 2020)

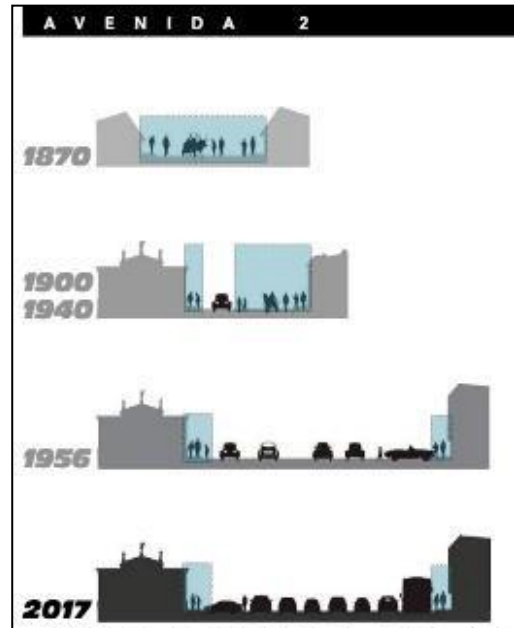


Image 12: Mobility system of San José through the years (Vargas, Chaverri, Seas, & Vuurmans, 2017)

### 5.3 User Patterns

Now that the history and the physical characteristics of *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura* have been described, this section provides information about the user groups, user activities and user interactions that have been identified for both *Plaza de la Cultura* and *Parque Central* during the fieldwork period. While the fieldwork period was of shorter duration than expected due to the covid-19 outbreak, a reasonable understanding of the various user patterns has been obtained. The data for this section has been gathered through observations, keeping peat and street interviews. The user patterns contribute to a better understanding of the *lived* dimension in the production of space triad, as established by Lefebvre.

#### 5.3.1 *Parque Central*

##### 5.3.1.1 User groups in *Parque Central*

As mentioned earlier, *Parque Central* is a rather diverse and vibrant place. It is usually filled with people, irrespective of the time of day. The biggest user group can be characterized as middle-aged and older men who sit on benches or on plant beds borders. This group is present at most times of day. They are either retired and just spending time at the park to socialize and observe the goings-on in the park or taking a break from work.

Another user group that is often present are the shoe shiners. This group consists out of approximately four or five middle-aged men. They sit on benches or on the ground and try to make a livelihood through shoe polishing. The street vendors form the second largest user group in *Parque Central*. The number of women and men selling goods on the street seems to be roughly equal. Most of the street vendors are of

Nicaraguan origin without papers who walk around with large bags filled with lollypops, crisps, chewing gum or other items like key chains and, during the last days of research, disinfectant gel and face masks. Next to these vendors, other street vendors are local youngsters who try to sell SIM cards and middle-aged men selling lottery tickets. These persons are formally employed locals.

While in less large numbers than men, women are also present at the park. Some are taking a break from work and some spend time around the fountain where their children play with pigeons. Sometimes, female sex workers hang out in the park in search of clients. Homeless also hang around in the park. They are either talking to others or sleeping on the grass. They are regularly interrupted by police officers that ask them for their papers or send them away. On Tuesdays, a priest visits the park and preaches for more than an hour. Other user groups that have been observed numerously are young couples, street cleaners, tourists and people in wheelchairs. The different user groups at *Parque Central* are visible in figure 7.

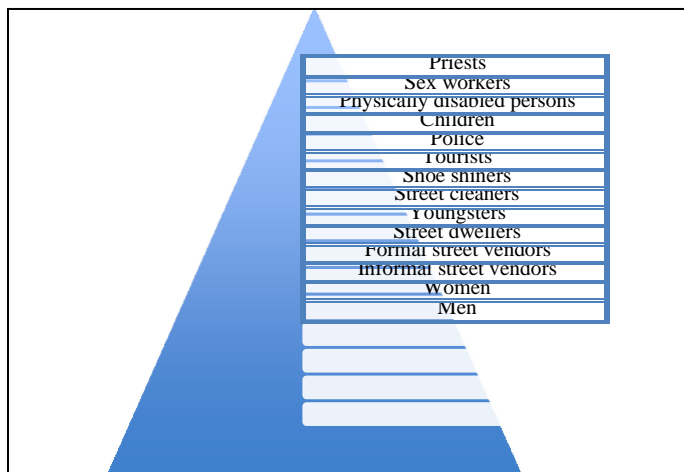


Figure 7: User groups in *Parque Central* based on peat during fieldwork

### 5.3.1.2 User activities in *Parque Central*

Apart from the different user groups that can be distinguished, it is also interesting to look at the range of activities that users engage in. User groups and user activities partly overlap since some user groups are characterised based on their activity. It is hereby also relevant to think about the user groups and activities that are not observed since some groups may already be excluded from the space; invisibility is a crucial feature of modern inequality. The user activities in *Parque Central* are mainly sitting, waiting, walking, talking, vending, shoe shining, sleeping, a bit of playing by the children who play with pigeons, tourists taking pictures, preaching, listening, eating and drinking. While the amount of activities is bigger and more diverse compared to *Plaza de la Cultura*, there are other typical park activities that are not observed here, such as playing sports, making music, drawing or painting and sunbathing. This partly has to do with the lack of facilities that support these activities.

### 5.3.1.3 User interactions in *Parque Central*

The user interactions are important since it is known that social cohesion and tolerance can be built in inclusive public spaces. Furthermore, friendly social interactions in

public spaces promote trust and participation, particularly among marginalized groups (Gehl Institute, 2017). In *Parque Central*, several user groups interact with each other. The biggest user group, middle-aged and older men, consider the park as a social space where people can come together and share thoughts and experiences. Street vendors also describe their interactions in the park as plenty and friendly. People do not react to their presence in a negative way. Different user groups that are often present in the park such as the middle-aged and older men, the street cleaners, the homeless and the shoe shiners all got to know each other and often socialize with each other.

Other user groups experience their interactions in *Parque Central* differently. Several women indicated that they did not feel safe at the park because of the men shouting comments to them or asking them questions. They use the park to spend shorter amounts of time compared to the men, for example to meet someone else. The youngsters in the park do not interact much with other users, the same goes for the tourists that visit the park whom also indicated to not feel safe during a street interview.

The preaching hour of the priest appears to be a social event. Many people, men, women, disabled people, tourists, homeless and vendors gather around the priest and sit or stand next to each other in a large circle. In-between and after preaching, the public interacts with each other through short conversations. Lastly, it is important to note that the *Parque Central* is mostly used by working-class people. The wealthy elites of San José seem to avoid the park because of feelings of insecurity and due to the fact that most elites live in suburbs located further away from the city centre. Travelling between these suburbs and the city centre is time consuming due to the daily traffic jams. The coming of large malls like Multiplaza Escazu further facilitates this process of class-based segregation.

### 5.3.2 Plaza de la Cultura

#### 5.3.2.1 User groups on the Plaza de la Cultura

The user groups that are observed on the *Plaza de la Cultura* are noticeable less in number than those observed at *Parque Central* (Figure 8). The *plaza* can be characterized as less diverse, vibrant and lively than the park. It seems to be mostly a passers-by space instead of a space where people actually spend time. However, two user groups stand out in terms of the amount of time they spent on the *plaza* every day. These two groups are the security guards and the cleaning team. These two groups only leave the *plaza* at the end of the day, only to come back first thing in the morning. At a normal day, there are three security guards present at the *plaza*, two from the BCCR who stand right in front of the I-store and one from the Gold Museum who spends most of his time at the other side of the *plaza*.

The cleaners spend their whole workday by cleaning the *plaza*. Since the *plaza* is used by very few people every day, there is not much to clean apart from the pigeon droppings that land on the surface of the *plaza*. Apart from these two user groups, other groups are men, women, or youngsters who sit along the fence that surrounds the national theatre on the Southern side of the *plaza* where a small strip of shade can be

caught. Most of these people either are spending their breaks from work there or are waiting for someone to meet.

Interestingly, the streets that surround the *plazas* most of the time are usually filled with people. An interview in one of these streets with a young male street vendor quickly explains this. According to him, he cannot enter the *plaza* because he would get sent away in less than 5 minutes<sup>8</sup>. This is also shown by the street vendors who stand about one meter away from the *plaza* where they sell bags of corn to feed the pigeons. This attracts young families who buy the bags of corn to give to their children so that they can play with the pigeons. In this corner, there is also a tree with plant bed borders that older people use to sit on and watch the children and pigeons playing. The difference in social activities on both sides of the demarcation line of where the rules presented on the BCCR panels no longer apply and where public life comes back to life can be seen as a social manifestation and appropriation of BCCR jurisdiction. Image 13 shows this demarcation line between the *plaza* and the surrounding street.

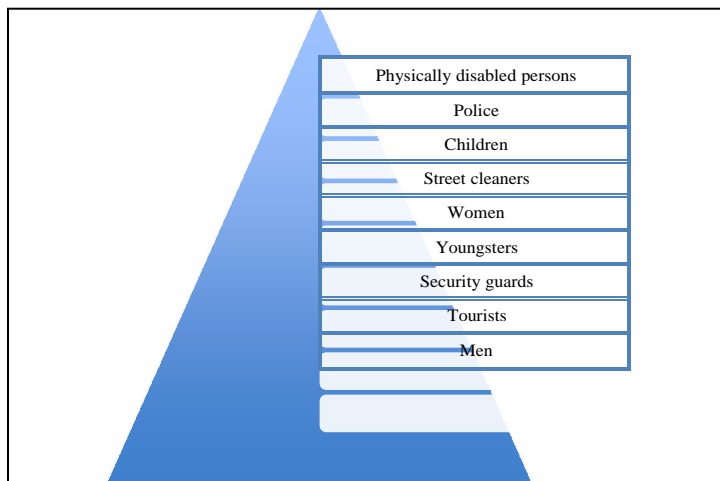


Figure 8: User groups at *Plaza de la Cultura* based on peat during fieldwork

### 5.3.2.2 User activities on the *Plaza de la Cultura*

The user activities at the *plaza* are sparse. The activities that have been observed on the *plaza* are sitting, standing, walking, talking, calling on the phone and tourists taking pictures. Small amounts of students and business people walk through the *plaza* or wait for others to meet. However, at the evening around 10 p.m. the *plaza* gets livelier. More youngsters visit the *plaza* to play music, dance and skate. This only happens in the late evenings since the guards usually have left around this time, making it safe for the youngsters to hang-out without getting sent away. Furthermore, evenings are more pleasant at the *plaza* since the burning sun is no longer bothering at that time of day.

The small amount of activity on the *plaza* during daytime can directly be explained by the user rules and guidelines written on the BCCR panels. These guidelines directly exclude musicians, artists and street vendors, by prohibiting street vending and by prohibiting audio-visual production. It also directly excludes skaters, skateboarders and cyclists since they are not allowed on the *plaza*. Furthermore, it impedes the enjoyability of children since they are not allowed to feed the pigeons or

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication, street interview with street vendor at *Plaza de la Cultura* 13/03/2020

to climb, run or jump on the elevated walkways and benches. While some of the rules on the panels serve in order to meet the needs of disabled persons, the lack of seats and shadow disadvantages people who experience mobility difficulties.

All of these restrictions in terms of behaviour have been brought forward since the renovation four years ago. A description from the Lonely Planet of 2015 of the *Plaza de la Cultura* shows the changes that have been caused since: *This architecturally unremarkable concrete plaza in the heart of downtown is usually packed with locals slurping ice-cream cones and admiring the wide gamut of San José street life: juggling clowns, itinerant vendors and cruising teenagers. It is perhaps one of the safest spots in the city as there's a police tower stationed at one corner. Fun people-watching* (Lonely Planet, 2015). This difference in uses is remarkable, since clowns and vendors are not allowed to be at the *plaza* anymore and there are currently no or very few people to watch there.

#### 5.3.2.3 User interactions on the *Plaza de la Cultura*

Since there are few user groups on the *plaza*, the amount of user interactions is also small. During daytime, the scope of interactions between space users is negligible. The daytime users are often spending their time alone, waiting for someone to walk off with. During the late evenings however, interactions become larger in number due to the youngsters that hang out there. The group sometimes attracts younger tourists who spend some time with them making music or skateboarding. It seems as if these intercultural interactions are caused by shared interests in music, skateboarding and in having a good time.

Here, another appropriation of the rules of the BCCR on the *plaza* can be observed. Where this happens during daytime through crossing the physical boundary of BCCR jurisdiction, at night-time it happens through crossing the time-bound limit. This data shows how the differences in user patterns between *Plaza de la Cultura* and *Parque Central* are substantial. *Parque Central* is a more vibrant and diverse place while *Plaza de la Cultura* is losing its social functions in the city centre. The positive effects of diversity and interactions between users in public space, such as civic trust, tolerance and participation therefore do not manifest.



Image 13: Demarcation line between *Plaza de la Cultura* and surrounding street (personal picture, 2020).

## 5.4 Concluding Remarks

To finish this first empirical chapter, some short concluding remarks are made. The historical analysis explains how *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura* are interrelated since the latter arose from social contestation and perceptions that *Parque Central* no longer represented. *Plaza de la Cultura* was therefore created in order to preserve the culture of the past in a modern, Costa Rican form. However, years after its creation, *Plaza de la Cultura* now represents other values as initially intended; modern consumer culture and North American capitalism instead of an egalitarianism and the celebration of indigenous values.

Physically, *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura* show vast disparities. *Plaza de la Cultura* hosts almost no facilities and exudes a modern and clean image with causes many aesthetical restrictions to be in place. It furthermore consists of strong discursive features that display rules and regulations. At *Parque Central*, no such discursive features are in place. However, the creation of a pedestrian boulevard has heralded the advent of a comprehensive security camera system, by which the physical characteristics of this place also contribute to a decrease in publicness and accessibility. The car-centered dominant socio-technical mobility system is embedded in society in San José. This system is classed and gendered and linked to the high levels of perceived insecurity. It facilitates a further withdrawal from the public sphere and disadvantages pedestrians, who are given little space in the city centre. This causes irritation, which is voiced towards the street vendors who are blamed for the existing circulation problems in downtown San José.

Lastly, user patterns have proven to be more diverse and vibrant at *Parque Central* compared to *Plaza de la Cultura*. However, two appropriations of space have been distinguished at *Plaza de la Cultura*. In one of these, youth use time regulations

in order to still be able to use the *plaza* during late hours when security guards have left. In the other one, vendors sell bags of corn right next to the plaza, outside of BCCR legislation to still be able to reach a large public without being sent away by the security guard present. This chapter has furthermore touched upon the *lived*, *planned* and the *perceived* dimensions of both spaces. The following chapter will further elaborate on occurring mismatches between these three dimensions.



## 6. Exclusionary Impetus

This chapter describes the different mechanisms that influence the publicness and accessibility of *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura* as described in the third sub question of this research. These exclusionary mechanisms are subdivided within three overarching impetus, namely privatization, securitization and disneyfication, that stimulate the decrease in publicness and accessibility in the studied urban public spaces. The mechanisms have been uncovered through an abridged ethnographic study of space and through policy discourse analysis and are explained using empirical examples.

### 6.1 Securitization

Previous research points to the widespread increase of security and surveillance measures in public spaces (Miethe, 1995; Sandercock, 2003; Kohn, 2004; Low, 2006). While security systems like these can make people feel more safe and assist police in their operations, they are also known to generate a decrease in the publicness of public spaces since they provide power to the police to control and monitor who is engaged with which activities in public spaces (Kohn, 2004). The exclusion of certain space users due to the “inappropriateness” of these groups or of the activities these users are engaged in according to police officers’ perspectives impedes the essential democratic character of public spaces. Especially since previous research shows how race and class-based inequalities are reproduced through these perspectives on spatial control (Low, 2009).

Garnett points to the fact that the inherent vagueness of many of the legal limitations put on state control over public space often gives too much power to local authorities, including the police, and too little to citizens (Garnett, 2012). It is therefore relevant to critically examine and question the recent developments of securitization in public spaces and the consequences of these trends, in order to pursue the democratic character and the related inclusiveness of public spaces. Especially considering the crucial clause embedded in the United Nations’ SDG’s to “leave no one behind” which grants the commitment to meet the targets and goals for all nations and people and for all segments of society (UNstats, 2020). The influence of securitization is investigated through fieldwork and a policy discourse analysis.

#### 6.1.1 The Manifestation of Urban Fear

When visiting San José, the presence of urban fear quickly becomes apparent. Locals numerously warn for dangerous urban areas, streets not to walk in and the danger of walking outside after sunset. Almost all residences are surrounded by high, double locked fences and, in the richer neighbourhoods, equipped with private security systems. Furthermore, travelling with public transport is discouraged. Some locals even explain how they avoid visiting downtown San José whatsoever, due to the insecure character of the area. The urban society seems to be saturated with fear, giving rise to the emergence of a so-called *closed-city* or *ciudad cerrada*, characterized by fortification and little citizen participation (Sandercock, 2003). Analysis shows that

urban fear or perceived insecurity is being (re)constructed through policy discourses which in turn manifest in society through urban policies in public and private securitization. The manifestation of the *closed city* further enhances urban segregation and decreases citizen participation, which sharpens existing fears of unknown “others”. This raises the question of where these widespread feelings of insecurity throughout society come from. Different theories explain how feelings of fear and insecurity grow as a result of forces of modernization, globalization and neoliberalization. Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens state that the process of modernization and transition from older forms of industrial society to postmodern society initiate a variety of man-made risks that transcend political and geographical boundaries that give rise to fundamental changes in social and cultural structures. An important component of the fear created by these processes of modernization has to do with the presumption that governments are increasingly unable to accurately deal with these newly produced risks (Beck, 1986; Giddens, 2006).

Urban fear has intensified in San José during and after periods of rapid urbanisation and economic instability. The adaptation of neoliberal policies seems to have increased urban inequality and segregation. Between 1990 and 2014, income inequality and unemployment have increased sharply in Costa Rica while crime rates have been fluctuating (Sandoval-Garcia, 2013). This, together with a substantial influx of refugees from surrounding countries has created fertile grounds for the growth of urban fear of “others”. Miethe points to the development in which modern society is physically and socially creating constructed risks and, as a consequence, an increasing wish to respond to these potential risks manifests in withdrawing from the public sphere (Miethe, 1995). In San José, these theories seem to hold some truth in the on-going urban processes.

This withdrawal from public life is visible in San José in the car-centric character that proliferates in the city as well as in the avoidance of the downtown area by upper social classes. The increase of gated-communities in and around the GAM and the emergence of so-called “mini-cities” in which elite groups can live and consume without being confronted with the hazards of the outside world are other examples of the latter. Logically, this development impacts the character and role of public spaces in society largely. The role of local public authorities in combating this disengagement or *closed-city* character can be described as contradictory. Citizen participation is an important element of healthy democracies (Gehl Institute, 2017) and therefore logically something the local government aims to improve. From the analysis of policy documents it can be observed that local public authorities try to stimulate such participation, partly through public spaces:

*This programme promotes the democratisation of culture by encouraging citizen participation and fostering local cultural identity, by highlighting the historical, cultural and architectural heritage in the communities and the artistic products. It also favours the public and collective character of culture, promoting the contact of citizens with those manifestations that facilitate expression and coexistence: festivals, concerts, exhibitions, fairs, live shows, art in public space, open air cinema, parties, workshops,*

*training and others. It encourages the enjoyment of art, the promotion of young communal talents and cultural enterprises*<sup>9</sup>

The government has clearly put citizen participation and “opening up the city” on its agenda. The previously quoted text refers to the Municipal policy programme that goes under the name “Coexistence and a Culture of Peace”. The goal of this programme is to facilitate citizens’ assertion of their cultural rights by opening and strengthening spaces for communication, direct participation and co-responsibility. These goals are to be achieved through the organisation of numerous cultural and artistic events and by purchasing and restoring artworks in public spaces (Municipalidad de San José , 2017). The programme embodies one of the four components that together form the Municipal development programme of 2017 to 2020. The following four axes together form this development plan:

- 1. Equity, solidarity and human development*
- 2. Coexistence and a culture of peace*
- 3. Competitiveness and environmental responsibility*
- 4. Intelligent and leadership municipal management*

The policy document also elaborates on providing care for vulnerable groups. This is incorporated in the programme “Equity, Solidarity and Human Development”. The street population is taken into account in this regard. One agenda point called “Harm Reduction and Social Inclusion services for the Homeless” aims to attend to at least 1000 people a year in situation of indigence, with services of sleeping, cleaning and personal hygiene, food, intervention, institutional reference and others (Municipalidad de San José , 2017). This shows that the Municipal Government is including this group in its policy. It is however not clear whether or not street vendors count as street population and qualify for this care according this policy document, since they are mentioned as separate groups:

*...the large number of street vendors - some of whom use the sales as a screen for crime - and the population in a state of indigence, some of which are dedicated to petty theft and micro drug trafficking* (Municipalidad de San José , 2017).

The first and far most agenda point seems to remain combating (perceived) insecurity in the canton. The Municipal Government is doing this through a set of measures that are part of the “Coexistence and a Culture of Peace” axe. This could be called rather contradicting, since several of the corresponding measures may negatively affect the stimulation of citizens’ participation, perceived urban security and the amount of people living on the street through the disruption of livelihoods. A study on citizens’ security performed by five researchers of the University of Costa Rica explains how security is reduced to surveillance and putting more police on the streets, without actively

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<sup>9</sup> Municipal Development Plan 2017-2020, Axe 4.1: Coexistence and a Culture of Peace, Point 4.2.1 Democratization of Culture and the Promotion of Talent on a Local Level, Page nr. 86.

addressing the deeper laying causes of insecurity. They point to the dangerous development in which citizens ascribe insecurity solely to institutions while distancing themselves from the establishment of peaceful coexistence, which further impedes possibilities for social cohesion and inclusion (Lovell, Arguedas, Montoya , Mora, & Marin , 2013). The Municipal policy plan proposes the following in combatting urban insecurity:

*The first priority is to address one of the problems that most concerns the people of San José and visitors to the canton, which is insecurity. In order to improve and strengthen citizen security, projects have been incorporated to improve the infrastructure where the municipal police are located:*

- Construction of the second stage of the operations centre*
- Expansion of the temporary apprehension centre in Barrio Lujan*
- Construction of the merchandise seizure control centre in Barrio Cuba*
- Improvements to the dog police facilities in Hatillo 2*

*In addition, the police force will be strengthened with actions such as increasing the number of municipal police, managing the approval of the bill to strengthen the municipal police, expanding police coverage outside the central area, accrediting more police officers as traffic inspectors and expanding the video surveillance and alarm monitoring network in the institutional monitoring centre (Municipalidad de San José, 2017).*

This shows that Municipal authorities continue to try and battle widespread perspectives of insecurity with more police forces, monitoring and surveillance. While crime rates have indeed increased sharply around 2008, they quickly went down again between 2010 and 2012. Another increase is visible from 2014 to 2016. A research concerning the perspectives that Costa Ricans have towards crime shows how most inhabitants perceived an increase in different types of crime between 2009 and 2012, while crime rates actually went down during those years (See figures 9 and 10) (The World Bank, 2016). Although the objective levels of criminal violence are the lowest in Costa Rica compared to other countries in Central America, perceived insecurity is the most intense (van Lidth de Jeude, Schutte, & Quesada, 2015). This indicates that rates of fear of crime and actual crime do not necessarily correspond and that feelings of insecurity thus, at least partly, originate elsewhere.

A quantitative study on perceived insecurity in public space in Barcelona that takes personal, social and environmental variables into consideration shows how environmental variables (such as illumination, vandalism, presence of potential aggressors and available opportunities of social support) only limitedly influence perceptions of insecurity. This finding is confirmed by the two figures below. Strong links were found between perceived insecurity and processes of social interaction and the social construction of insecurity through discourses (Carro, Valera, & Vidal, 2008). This indicates that while an increase in police forces in public space may help to combat actual crime, it is inefficient in addressing perceived insecurity, which rates are higher in San José. In order to reduce perceived crime rates in public spaces, the Municipal

government should focus more on building social cohesion and on changing the existing social discourse of fear towards *others*.

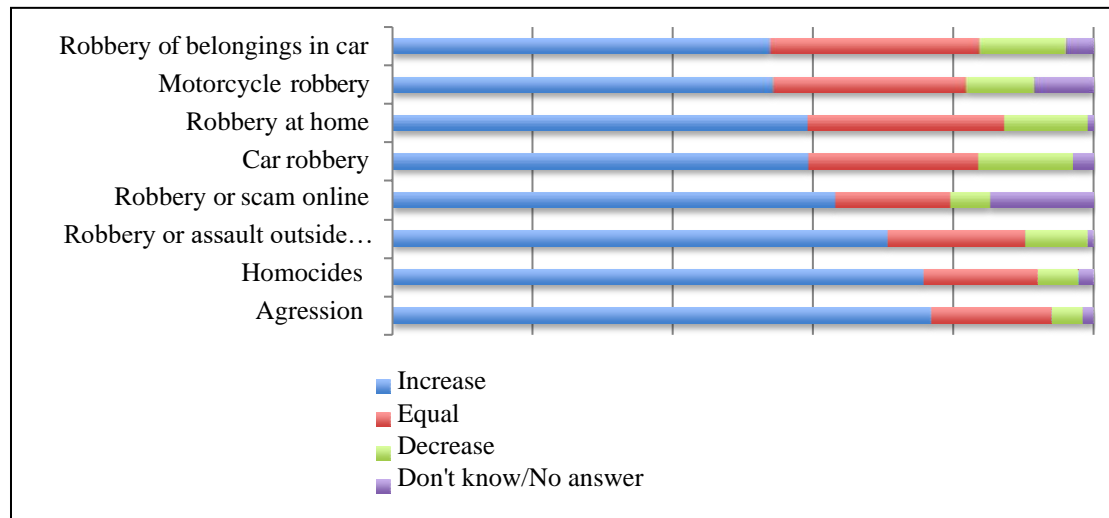


Figure 9: Crime perspectives of Costa Ricans (Universidad de Costa Rica, 2012)

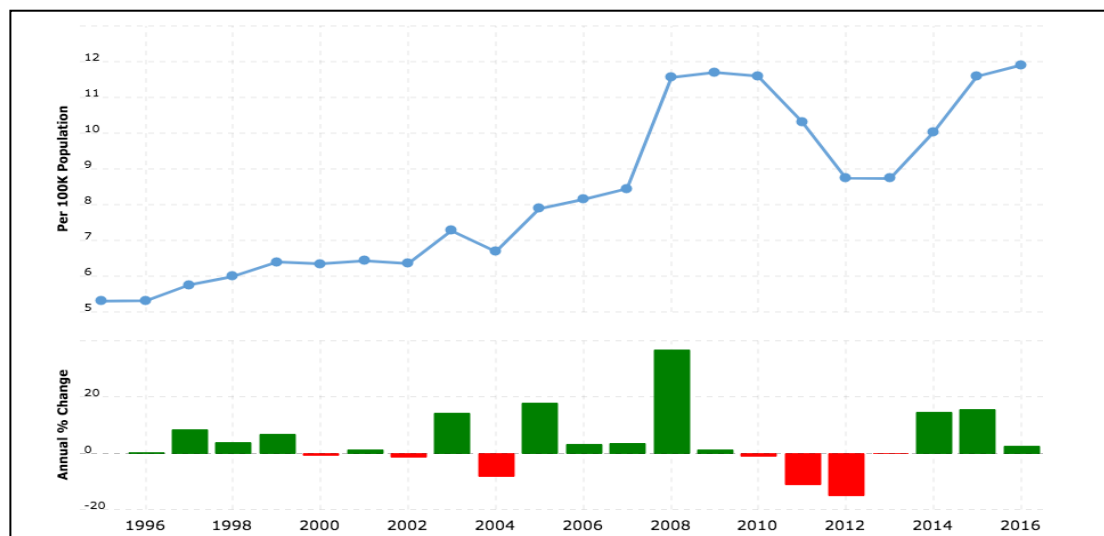


Figure 10: Crime rates Costa Rica (World Bank, 2016)

### 6.1.2 The Institutionalization of Urban Fear

The widespread perceptions of citizen insecurity in San José are embedded and reproduced through legal discourses. This illustrates how the perceived dimension of space influences the planned dimension. The performed policy discourse analysis illustrates the way in which the Municipal Police correspond on their operations through Facebook. The police extensively post their daily activities of sending away street vendors, clearing squatting sites and arresting small-scale drug dealers and petty thieves. Feelings of insecurity may increase among citizens when being confronted with such posts on Facebook on a regular basis. Furthermore, it may influence and further enhance perceptions towards groups of *others* since the local police create negative representations of people in informal employment.

The institutionalization of urban fear becomes apparent in the legal discourse in which the Municipality and the police communicate about issues of safety towards the citizens of San José. The following safety advice stems from 2011 and shows how the Municipality engages in a discourse of fear while placing the responsibility of safety in the hands of citizens themselves. Furthermore, it disfavours people whom do not drive or own a car and people who do not dispose of the means of paying for a taxi, which are often groups that already suffer from higher vulnerability, like women and people with lower socio-economic status.

- *How to avoid being assaulted: If you travel by car, leave it in the parking lot closest to your destination.*
- *How to avoid being assaulted: Avoid walking in dark and remote places. This recommendation has been given many times, but many take the route with less illumination because it is shorter or because it saves money. If the place is dangerous, it is best to travel by taxi.*
- *How to avoid being assaulted: Do not walk through areas you do not know. Find out about the safety of the place beforehand from a neighbouring policeman (Municipalidad San José, 2011).*

Interestingly, while the Municipality promoted taking safety in own hands in 2011, its focus has now shifted towards a stance in which the municipality takes greater responsibility for protecting its citizens. This could be explained by the fact that the topic of urban insecurity has become one of the most important points in political campaigns in Costa Rica over the years. The subject took on special relevance during the electoral campaign for the 2010-2014 presidential administration since homicide rates had been fluctuating during the years prior (Mora, 2016). Costa Rica's first female president named Laura Chinchilla from the *Partido Liberación Nacional* won the election.

The PLN developed a quite moderate agenda and attempted to address the issue of insecurity through prevention and control, which explains the safety advice from 2011. Civil society was however closer to the proposal of other parties that demanded a *mano dura* in combatting crime (Mora, 2016). This might explain the shift in tone of voice towards the subject of crime during later years. However, more research on the latter is necessary in order to accurately explain these matters. Mora also points to the relevance of the discursive dimension in understanding the phenomena of civil insecurity. The findings from the discourse analysis on the local polices' Facebook page supports this argument.

The policy discourse analysis that was carried out for this study shows that the Municipal police use various rhetorical techniques in their Facebook posts in order to transfer their ideas and perceptions towards their target group, the citizens of San José. In reporting, the police numerously link insecurity, danger and crime to the aspect of informality or more directly, to street vendors. In their online messaging, the police seem to connect certain existing urban problems to street vending in order to legitimize their actions towards the public, without providing evidence-based figures. For example, by mentioning that the products that street vendors sell are unsafe or toxic

and health damaging. Furthermore, the Municipal Police use particular urban rights, such as the right to security and the right to free transit, to violate street vendors' urban rights, like the democratic use of public space or the right to special protection in vulnerable situations (UN Habitat, 2016). This illustrates the way in which urban rights are appropriated in a way to legitimize the violation of other urban rights.

- *Operations to control street sales today generated more than 60 seizures in San José. On Central Avenue and in Central Park, with the support of the Public Force, we located foodstuffs in poor condition. We defend the right of pedestrians to walk freely! (San José Municipal Police Facebook page, posted on 13/03/2020)*



- *Av 0 y 2, Calle 3 These avocados were offered to the public by a street vendor. Don't risk your health! Don't be a street buyer! Let's defend together the right of pedestrians to walk freely! (San José Municipal Police Facebook page, posted on 15/08/2019)*



- *This morning, before the traditional downpours of the time, we did confiscations from street sales in the SJO Central Park. We defend the right of people to walk freely! (San José Municipal Police Facebook page, posted on 28/05/2019)*



- *Dozens of seizures from street vendors were made today in conjunction with the Public Force. You can help us defend public spaces! Don't be a street buyer! (San José Municipal Police Facebook page, posted on 22/06/2019)*



Furthermore, street vendors are inherently framed as a threat to public spaces by stating that they are something that public spaces and the city as a whole should be defended from. This is an example of a loaded saying that is used to help construct certain arguments. An extended security camera system seems to assist the local police forces in this defence. The police are eager to make public space users aware of their constant control through camera presence, as they report on this online regularly. The amount and the exact positions of the cameras that are present in both spaces are illustrated in the figure below that was constructed on the basis of fieldwork observations.



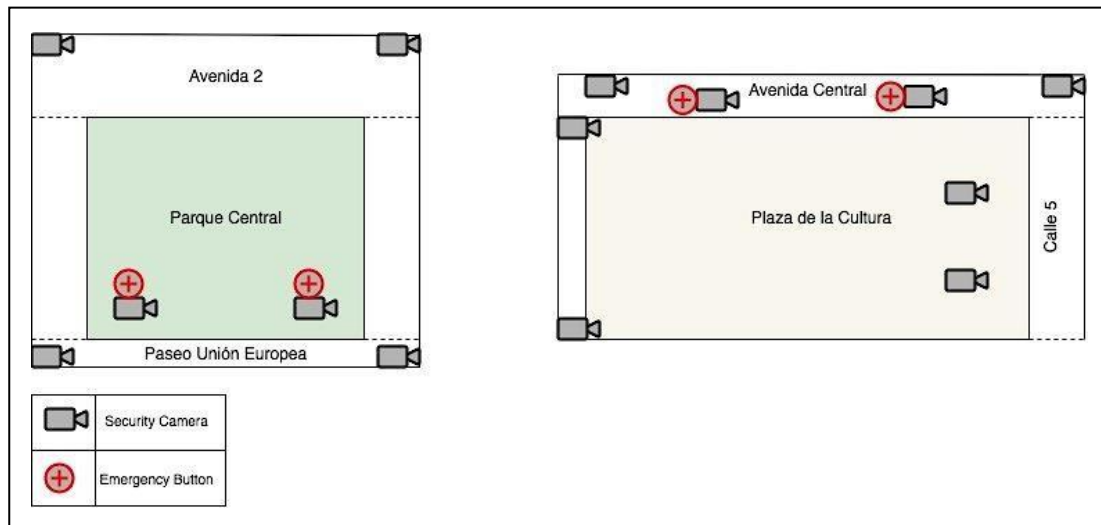


Figure 11: Security camera presence at *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura* (Personal data, 2020)

Here, the positions of the so-called emergency buttons are also visible. These buttons are located on the sides of electrical panels that also have a camera on both sides. The buttons on these panels are directly connected to the municipal police-monitoring centre. The electrical panels display texts concerning the usage of the button and commercial advertisements (Image 14). The panels are called “intelligent totems” and emit a constant Wi-Fi signal. According to the mayor of San José, these new totems of artificial intelligence contribute to the liveability of the city centre. He announced that 70 intelligent totems are to be placed throughout the city centre (La Republica , 2019). In a way, the panels are an accurate symbolisation of the forces of modernisation, neoliberalisation and securitisation that increasingly shape the urban landscape in San José, all wrapped up in one intelligent totem.

Concerning the matter of conflicts between street vendors and the police, it is relevant to mention that the largest group of street vendors in San José are currently of Nicaraguan descent and that hostile opinions from Costa Ricans towards Nicaraguans have been problematical for years already (Sandoval-Garcia, 2004; Malone, 2019). It is thus worth questioning whether the Municipal Police is engaged in activities that promote and reproduce these feelings of anti tolerance towards Nicaraguan immigrants and refugees by linking them to or existing urban issues. In an interview in *Parque Central*, a Costa Rican



Image 14: Intelligent totem next to *Plaza de la Cultura* (Personal picture, 2020)

respondent explained how he thinks all Nicaraguans are dirty, bad educated, different, dangerous and crazy. He states that Nicaraguans are known to kill others with machete knives<sup>10</sup>. The danger of this large amount of police control over public spaces lies in the fact that previous research points to the reproduction of existing race and class based differences through ethnic profiling (Low, 2006).

This group of informal street vendors has few resources to fall back on in Costa Rica. The government explicitly states that they are willing to create accurate policy in order to deal with the obstruction problems caused by vendors in the streets, however, a distinction is hereby made between *vendedores ambulantes* and *vendedores callejeras*. The difference in use of words is lost in translation; therefore, the original, untranslated texts are displayed in a footnote. The first group, *vendedores ambulantes*, refers mainly to non-Costa Rican, informal street vendors while the second group, *vendedores callejeras*, refers to Costa Rican street vendors who, as opposed to the first group, are in the possession of legal documents and pay taxes. This group is taken seriously as a public space user in the policy document:

*The design of new policies must be based on respect for the following elements: The needs of all road users, and not just private vehicles: buses, passengers, pedestrians, taxis, loading and unloading of goods, parking lots, entrances and exits of establishments, street vendors;*<sup>11</sup>

However, the other group of street vendors is negatively portrayed in the governmental policy document in the following two sections:

*Other elements that contribute to the increase in crime rates are the existence in the central area of many places that are dedicated to the reception of stolen goods, the large number of street vendors - some of whom use the sales as a cover-up for crime - and the population in a state of destitution, some of which are dedicated to petty theft and micro drug trafficking*<sup>12</sup>

*Nevertheless there is a loss of competitiveness, and dynamism with respect to other cantons in the surrounding area due to factors such as: deprived areas (homeless, delinquents, ghettos) in the centre and periphery of the city, street vendors invading the public space of common use of circulation, citizen*

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<sup>10</sup> Personal communication, street interview with space user at *Parque Central*, 10/03/2020

<sup>11</sup> *Original: Necesidades de todos los usuarios del espacio vial, y no solamente de los vehículos privados: autobuses, pasajeros, peatones, taxis, carga y descarga de mercancías, estacionamientos, entradas y salidas de los establecimientos, vendedores callejeros;*

<sup>12</sup> *Original: Otros elementos que contribuyen a aumentar las tasas de delitos son la existencia en el casco central de gran cantidad de lugares que se dedican a la recepción de artículos robados, la gran cantidad de vendedores ambulantes – algunos de los cuáles utilizan las ventas como mampara para delinquir – y la población en estado de indigencia, algunos de los cuáles se dedican a realizar pequeños hurtos y al micro tráfico de drogas.*

*insecurity, road congestion, inadequate and inefficient public transport, commerce without parking for clients, response time of municipal procedures*<sup>13</sup>

In these pieces of text, the government negatively portray street vendors as a whole by linking them to crime and urban deprivation. The use of the term “invading” makes it appear as if the municipal government is referring to an insect plague instead of a group of displaced people. This metaphor is used in order to support the arguments of the police. What is significant in this reflection on fear in the city is that the existing discourse of fear and disorder has produced and produces higher rates of perceived insecurity and as a reaction on this, a particular politics and set of policy responses that therefore can be labelled an institutionalization of urban fear. Furthermore, the discourse analysis shows a criminalization of informality, portrayed both by the Municipal Police and the Municipal Government.

Interestingly, the analysed material shows similarities to real life events. This is reflected, for example, in the difference in names that are used in the policy document to describe the two types of street vendors and in the way in which they are treated by the police in public spaces. The manifestation and the institutionalization of urban fear have a considerable impact on the publicness and accessibility of both *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*. Discourses of fear limit peoples’ enjoyability of both *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*. Furthermore, it has helped to create a set of policy responses in terms of securitization through which a large amount of control is handed over to the police in managing the spaces, which impedes the open-access and democratic character of public spaces and possibly stimulates negative perspectives and stereotypes towards these groups of *others*. The criminalization of informal street vendors incarnates them as “inappropriate space users” which restricts them from maintaining a livelihood through public spaces, or more specifically, *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*.

## 6.2 Privatization

This section briefly discusses the history in which Costa Rica gradually adopts several neoliberal policies that have influenced and still influence the urban landscape and life in the GAM. Through the increase of urban laissez-faire policies, private investors have increased their influence over urban development. These processes of privatization and commodification of urban land erodes social functions of public spaces and excludes “inappropriate” or “undesired” space users. The way in which this is taking place at the *Plaza de la Cultura* is explained and illustrated by the aid of policy- and historical analysis.

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<sup>13</sup> *Original: No obstante hay una pérdida de competitividad, y dinamismo frente a otros cantones del área circundante debido a factores tales como: zonas deprimidas (indigentes, delincuentes, ghettos) en el centro y periferia de la ciudad, vendedores ambulantes que invaden el espacio público de uso común de circulación, inseguridad ciudadana, congestión vial, transporte público inadecuado e ineficiente, comercio sin parqueos para clientes, tiempo de respuesta de trámites municipales.*

### 6.2.1 Neoliberal Policy Reforms

In order to thoroughly understand the implementation of the neoliberal policy reforms in Costa Rica, it is necessary to shortly discuss a defining period in history. The current Costa Rican constitution was created in 1949 after a brief civil war. The constitution implied several social guarantees, among which minimum wage and a social security net. In short, the post-civil war period in Costa Rica was defined by state-led economic growth and several significant improvements in well-being (Marois, 2005). However, all this changed due to the economic crisis that began during the late 70's. This crisis was brought about by the collapse of the Central American Common Market due to civil conflicts in El Salvador and Nicaragua. During the period between 1980 and 1986, Costa Rican exports fell by more than 60% (Wilson, 1994).

Following, Costa Rica borrowed heavily on the international markets to compensate for state expenditures and trade imbalances, which increased its international debt to 4 billion US dollars by 1983. During this period of economic crisis, social democrat and leader of the PLN, Luis Alberto Monge became president and announced several short-term economic measures that were necessary to gain control over the national economy (Marois, 2005). While these measures allowed the government to stabilize the economy, Monge introduced a series of structural neoliberal reforms that included a range of privatization measures, among which the denationalization of state banking (Wilson, 1994).

It is evident that neoliberal policy changes have deregulated land markets, providing more power to private investors in shaping the urban landscape. According to many, this shift in governance has led the attention of urban policy, planning and design away from spatial (in)justice towards what Smith calls the “revanchist city”. One feature of the revanchist city concerns the privatization and commodification of urban space in order to promote, market and sell the city (Smith, 1996). According to Murray, entrepreneurial modes of urban governance (EUG) have marked a shift from an emphasis on seeking ways to delivering public services and local resources fairly and efficiently, towards bringing together key stakeholders such as property owning elites to identify common concerns and generate ideas to attract the private investments that are needed for urban revitalization (Murray, 2017).

Ruiz and Segura describe the emergence of the “neoliberal city” in Costa Rica in three phases. The first phase entails the processes of deep neoliberalization in which the state has been rescaling and economically opening up to attract foreign direct investment, roughly taking place between the years 1980 and 2000. The second phase describes how socio-spatial restructuring processes within the GAM affect the polarization of urban development and wealth across an east-west axis, starting in 2000. During these years, private investors became the principal actors within the urban economy, which allowed them to increasingly shape the urban landscape. The last period is characterized by the intensification of processes of the urban real estate market. This phase started around 2006 (Ruiz & Segura, 2018). This deepening of social disparities through deregulation and *laissez-faire* urban policies is also described by van Noorloos and Steel (van Noorloos & Steel, 2017)

In the municipal development plan of 2017-2020, local authorities describe how they plan to implement another Special Economic Zone or *Zona de Desarrollo Económico Especial* (ZDEE) in order to attract companies and businesses linked to information technologies (Municipalidad de San José, 2017). This new ZDEE will be or is located in the historical centre, which indicates further influence of neoliberal policies over the urban landscape. The document does not elaborate on this zone and an online search for further information has yielded little. It is thus unclear what the exact content and scope of this zone entails. According to Murray, the expanded role of large-scale private developers and hybrid (public-private) planning regimes has become the norm in aspiring world-class cities. He explains how binary dichotomies separating public and private have come apart (Murray, 2017). This “hybridization” of space governance and blurring of boundaries increases existing legal vagueness of control over public spaces. Concerning the case studies of this study, such a hybridization of space seems to accurately describe what is happening at the *Plaza de la Cultura*.

### 6.2.2 Privately Owned Public Space (POPS)

As the BCCR explain on one of their user guideline panels, *Plaza de la Cultura* is a private space that is open for the public since its inauguration in 1982 (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018). Spaces that are owned and operated by private developers are often simply described as privately-owned public space (POPS) (Németh, 2009). While this seems pretty straightforward, historical analysis of the management, physical appearance and user patterns of the *plaza* illustrates that profound changes have occurred that have changed the relative publicness and accessibility of the space. Furthermore, the public-private dichotomy that is often used to describe the management of urban space is unable to accurately describe and understand the management of the *plaza*.

The case seems to be more complicated due to different factors. The area around the National Theatre was declared an area of public interest in 1973; the same year indicates the start of the construction project. While the government held responsibility for the administration of the project in the beginning, the BCCR quickly took over the financing and management of it two years after its birth (Museos Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018). Although this acquisition could count as a privatization through some perspectives, the degree to which this can be labelled a full privatization is still contestable since the Central Bank is an autonomous but public institution with its own legal personality (Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2019). For a significant period in time, the *plaza* appeared as a full public space without restrictions and typical POPS characteristics such as visible rules, security personal and type of design implying appropriate use (Németh, 2009).

The *plaza* was a lively and diverse urban space with several different user groups such as youngsters, children, families and street vendors. Concerts and small soccer games were not uncommon, and the place became listed as a pick up spot in gay tour books. At one point, discussion and friction arose over the extended use of the

space as a working spot for street vendors. Street vendors were daily present at the *plaza* in large numbers, which effected the enjoyment of other space users. This was made possible through the public legislation in 1990 that allowed vendors to freely use the plaza. At one point, the BCCR got entangled in a lawsuit against the vendors, from which the vendors eventually celebrated victory<sup>14</sup>.

#### 6.2.2.1 Legal Instruments that Restrict Use

Legal instruments that restrict the use of a space are described by Low as an exclusionary system in public space (Low, 1997). These legal instruments can come forward through public policies in which governments increasingly regulate spaces or through private policies, when private actors decide to create specific policy for the space they manage. In the latter scenario, actors have to take little or no account of local or national legislation, which facilitates the exclusion of certain groups. The same is happening at the *Plaza de la Cultura*. Interestingly, a law (N. 7363) allowed the creation of the Administrative Board of the Foundation of the Central Banks' museums on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November in 1993 with the aim of administering the banks' museums. Articles 2 and 3 of this law define the Foundation as a private entity and allow the Foundation to generate financial sources through the plaza in order to meet the needs and goals of the Foundation (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018). This newly established law marks the start of the commodification and further privatization of the *plaza*.

The years after not that much changed in the physical and legal dimensions of the space. However, the renovation of the *plaza* in 2016 marks the start of a period with increased restrictions, regulations and control. As mentioned earlier, benches and trees were removed during the renovation. The plaza was redesigned as a more modern, high-end and clean space. The cleanliness in this context holds truth both symbolically and literally, as a cleaning team is responsible for the daily mopping of the surface. Furthermore, security guards and user guideline panels were placed after the renovation. The physical renovation of the plaza was accompanied by the newly established legal regulations considering the use of the plaza by third parties in order to “optimize and guarantee a better way of use of the space” (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018).

The content of this legal document explicitly restricts the use of the plaza by street vendors and street artists, prohibits religious, ideological and sectarian characterized activity, unmediated political expression as well as demonstrations and the use of the *plaza* by press. Third parties that wish to use the space are asked to apply for a permit at least two months before the activity is to take place. Exemptions are made for taking pictures of personal use or to fulfil an academic task. The Foundation then makes assessments of the viability of the activity based on unknown criteria. Third party users are hereby obliged to finance security measures that the Foundation consider necessary (Museos del Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2018).

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<sup>14</sup> Personal communication, Zoom interview with Setha Low, 29/04/2020

A group of young local free city tour guides asked for a permit in order to recruit tourists for free city tours; this request was denied. According to the BCCR security guards, the tours are unsafe since the guides deliberately take tourists to unsafe parts of the city centre <sup>15</sup>. This illustrates how privatization and securitization are influencing life on the *plaza* and that the Foundation that administers the plaza is selective in granting permits. However, the *plaza* is still used for public activities and gatherings sometimes. A Facebook post on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2018 from the Municipal Police mentions how the 5<sup>th</sup> peace and security fair was held on the *plaza* that day. Several institutions attended the fair in order to “give safety tips to enjoy the Christmas season” (Policia Municipal San José, 2018). Critics have argued before how owners or managers of publicly accessible private spaces consistently prioritise security concerns over social interaction. Policy, design and legal tools are hereby used to exclude undesirable or “inappropriate” space users (Németh, 2009).

The same is true in the case of *Plaza de la Cultura*. The new design and management have reduced and degraded the space towards an empty and lifeless transit area, excluding several user groups from this previously vibrant urban space. Interestingly, Edwards points to the fact that infrastructures often change too slowly for people to notice. This often prevents the public from questioning the justness of infrastructures in place (Edwards, 2002). This process appears to occur at the *Plaza de la Cultura*, where the BCCR has asserted and increased its control steadily over a period of more than 20 years.

### 6.3 Disneyfication

This section describes several of the processes that enhance the exclusion of “inappropriate” space users, which can be scaled under the label “disneyfication”. As mentioned earlier, disneyfication describes the process in which aspects of society, such as urban space, become commercially transformed into western-styled, consumer-based and homogeneous spaces for “appropriate” users (Toolis, 2017; Murray, 2017). In San José, these developments are taking place through municipal urban renewal plans that aim to re-imagine the city in order to increase urban competitiveness. Disfavoured activities, groups and individuals that do not fit this image and that, according to the municipal government, do not add to the competitiveness of San José are hereby excluded from urban public spaces. This illustrates a mismatch between the *perceived* and the *lived* dimensions of urban spaces, which the Municipality aims to change through interventions in the *planned* dimension.

#### 6.3.1 Re-imagining the City

As mentioned earlier, the city of San José is struggling with a negative urban image. While most people admire Costa Rica for its peaceful character, great biodiversity and well-developed health care system, many tourists choose to spend little time in the capital due to the negative perspectives that cling to the city’s image. Locals do not

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Personal communication, Street interview with BCCR security guard, 02/03/2020

disagree and express their irritation about high levels of (perceived) insecurity and daily road congestions. Withdrawal from the public sphere and spatial segregation add to this deprived urban image. The local government is implementing several different policy measures in order to improve these negative features of San José. Most of these measures are captured in the fourth axe of the 2017-2020 Development Plan “Competitiveness and Environmental Responsibility”.

One of the operationalization questions for the policy discourse analysis concerns the emphasizing of certain themes. It hereby became clear that the theme of competitiveness is strongly emphasized throughout the document. Competitiveness seems to be an important aspect of the local development plan, since it re-emerges several different times on multiple topics. According to the document, there is a “*loss of competitiveness and dynamism in relation to the other cantons in the surrounding area due to depressed areas (homeless, delinquents, ghettos) in the centre and periphery of the city, street vendors who invade the public space of common use of circulation, citizen insecurity, road congestion, inadequate and inefficient public transport, commerce without parking for clients and response time of municipal procedures*” (Municipalidad de San José, 2017, p. 27). Interestingly, Purcell explains how local governance is being reoriented away from redistribution and toward competition (Purcell, 2002).

He states that local governments have become more concerned with ensuring that the local economy is competing effectively in the global economy since economic restructuring has made the local economy increasingly less a function of the national economy. Therefore, competitiveness has become the primary imperative that drives local policy making (Purcell, 2002). Crossa describes this process as entrepreneurial urban governance (EUG) and explains how it entails a wide range of strategies to attract inward investment and increases socio-spatial exclusion. She bases these findings on an analysis of a policy programme implemented in Mexico City called the *Programa*. This programme aims to promote Mexico as a site for inward investment and seeks to revitalize and beautify Mexico City’s Historic Centre by altering the area’s physical shape and image (Crossa, 2009). The policy analysis performed for this study shows aspects that are significantly similar to the *Programa*.

Attempts at re-imagining the city often include the creation of consumer attraction centres such as malls and cultural spaces and the reconstruction of the urban built environment (Harvey D., 1985; Boyle, 1999). The need for cities to appear as innovative, creative and safe places in which to live, visit, invest play and consume stands out. In such strategies, the city is commercialized as something to be sold, promoted and marketed (Crossa, 2009). It is important to note that urban regeneration programmes are sometimes necessary and often encompass improvements in well-being for citizens. However, several of the policy implementations in this regard can be seen as a form of EUG since it involves public and private actors aligned and reorients towards developments for a particular group of elites to attract inward investment without paying enough attention towards the role of non-elite groups in processes of urban change.



The policy analysis of San José's local development plan shows how eight different programmes serve to "*position the city of San José as a contemporary cultural tourist destination*". This is done, among others, through the creation of four different cultural and touristic routes through the historical centre, the realization of 30 touristic tours through the city, several different celebrations, concerts and festivals of which four are held at the *Plaza de la Cultura*, the creation of a tourist promotion action plan and the creation of several different public-private alliances in order to protect cultural, historical and architectural heritage (Municipalidad de San José, 2017, p. 93). The analysis clearly shows that the Municipality is trying to increase incomes in the tourist industry.

Another part of the policy axe "competitiveness and environmental responsibility" has as a main objective to "*strengthen the local economy together with different social actors, in order to increase income and employment generation*". According to the document, this is amongst other things done through the elaboration of two urban regeneration plans in the historic centre and in the southwest zone of the city. When looking at the specifications of the development plan, it remains unclear what "different social actors" refers to, since it only mentions "public, private, national and international entities". The creation of a special economic zone (SEZ) in the historic centre is another example of EUG policy that is being implemented in the city (Municipalidad de San José, 2017, p. 158). Further elaboration on the content and scope of both the urban regeneration plans and the SEZ is lacking. It therefore remains rather vague where and how these changes are implemented.

Furthermore, the municipality is aiming towards becoming a smart city. The goal of the programme is described as follows: "*To contribute to the development of the city of San José as an innovative city that uses and takes advantage of information and communication technologies (ICT) and other means to improve the quality of life, the efficiency of urban operations and services and competitiveness with respect to economic, social and environmental aspects*". Part of this programme is the redesign and implementation of a technological network for surveillance and citizen security (Municipalidad de San José, 2017, p. 162). Initiatives designed to make cities world class and/or smart is associated with the promotion of interests of capital and less so the public at large, let alone the disadvantaged of society (Mitchell, 2003).

On top of this, the document explains how "*one shortcoming of the city is the absence of a convention centre that would allow the city to be more competitive by attracting massive events and linking them with the cultural and accommodation offerings of the Canton*" (Municipalidad de San José, 2017, p. 22). The focus on competitiveness, attraction of inward investments and re-imagining the city comes forward clearly in the document. The thought that street vendors and homeless persons contribute to the loss of competitiveness has also been expressed. It is therefore not surprising to notice that street vendors and other "inappropriate space users" do not form part of "re-imagined" San José. The policy discourse strand on public space in San José seems to focus on maximizing the value of public space in order for it to serve as a driver of growth. Limited attention is paid towards different users and uses of

public space or to inclusive space management and equitable distribution of the economic and social benefits of public space.

### 6.3.2 The Appropriation of Space Users in a Disneyfied Urban Context

In order to be able to conclude on certain forms of social exclusion through transitions in public space in San José, it is important to elaborate on the “appropriation of space users” and what this implies exactly. In San José, the local municipality is working to re-imagine the city. Getting rid of negative urban perceptions is important, since such negative perceptions can lead to a further withdrawal from public life due to widespread feelings of insecurity (Miethe, 1995). Public life in its turn is relevant in order to sustain urban social cohesion, which is a significant determinant of population health and well-being (Gehl Institute, 2018). However, the way in which the local municipality is currently combatting this negative image, that is, amongst others, by creating sanitized privileged spaces for citizen participation in which unwanted users “invade” spaces with their disorderly “culture of informality” is resulting in the exclusion of several different groups in San José’s society.

Hereby, a difference is made between direct and indirect exclusion (Figure 12). Direct exclusion refers to the occasions in which users are inherently not able to engage in their user activities due to legal restrictions or due to the fact that they will be removed by the police. Indirect exclusion refers to ways in which certain groups are made less welcome or made feel like they “do not belong there”. This can be done, amongst others, through social or cultural representations, lack of facilities, exposure through camera systems or high-end designs that symbolically communicate who is welcomed or excluded (Low, 2009).

Before going into the several different groups that suffer from the burden of the decline in publicness and accessibility of public space in San José, it is relevant to elaborate on the group of street vendors.

Most street vendors in San José are displaced people from neighbouring countries such as

Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama. Ever since Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega’s violent crackdown on political opponents in April 2018, a record number of Nicaraguans have fled the country in order to seek asylum in Costa Rica. Approximately 24.000 Nicaraguans have formally explored asylum options in 2018.

	Directly Excluded	Indirectly Excluded
Parque Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street vendors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sex workers</li> <li>• Street dwellers</li> </ul>
Plaza de la Cultura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street vendors</li> <li>• Sex workers</li> <li>• Street dwellers</li> <li>• Shoe shiners</li> <li>• Street artists</li> <li>• Protesters</li> <li>• Priests</li> <li>• Press</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth (prohibiting of skates, skateboards, bicycles and music)</li> <li>• Gender based minorities</li> <li>• Elderly (lack of shade and seats)</li> </ul>

Figure 12: The direct and indirect exclusion of user groups at *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura*

This number presents a dramatic increase compared to the 6.300 asylum applications in 2017 (Malone, 2019).

This influx of Nicaraguan people has heightened pre-existing tensions and xenophobia among Josefinos and presumably increased the number of street vendors of Nicaraguan descent working in San José (Campos-Saborio, Nunez-Rivas, Holst-Schumacher, Alfora-Mora, & Chacon-Ruiz, 2018). Hostile opinions towards street vendors and street dwellers are thus likely to be fuelled by xenophobic and hostile attitudes towards this group. Street vendors are criminalized by the local police through online communication, which causes a negative stigma to be attached to this entire workforce. Another alarming reality has to do with the fact that street vendors' rights are further violated since the police publicly shame and expose vendors on Facebook. In this process, surnames are occasionally mentioned, and faces are shown on pictures that are posted online. The foreign nationality of vendors is hereby often also mentioned. These findings outline how the dynamics that follow from urban entrepreneurial governance and a production of space in San José are raced and classed.

Although this study has mainly focused on street vendors, other “informal” user groups are excluded as well. While some sex workers were still using *Parque Central* as a platform in order to maintain their livelihoods during the fieldwork period, a comparison with previous data shows that the number of sex workers present in *Parque Central* has gone down considerably. While this decrease can of course have different causes next to the decline in publicness and accessibility of public space, it is likely that increased security measures, regulations and exposure through cameras is influencing and harming their livelihoods. During an interview with two architects whom are active in a placemaking NGO called Semilla, it became clear that numerous sex workers, and especially transsexual sex workers are staying away from many central public spaces because they feel exposed and because people express feelings of disrespect towards them. The architects furthermore explained that people often call the police to “clean up the corner”<sup>16</sup>.

The fact that gender plays a significant role in the “appropriation” of space users became further highlighted during an interview with Setha Low. She explains how *Plaza de la Cultura* used to be a popular gathering place within the gay scene<sup>17</sup>. This reality is unfortunately also a thing of the past today. The empty, highly exposed and facility-lacking space offers few social opportunities for groups like these, whom struggle with the delineation of physical and social territory in a context with high levels of conservative and machismo values. These findings illustrate how previously existing forms of social cohesion that manifested in public spaces among minorities are disrupted through forces of privatization, securitization and disneyfication.

Another group that seems to be affected by the on-going transitions in public space in San José concerns young people or youth. The bans on numerous “unwanted” activities at the *Plaza de la Cultura* that youth in San José is often engaged in, like

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<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, interview with Sofía Suarez Zúñiga at the Architectural faculty of the University of Costa Rica, 10/03/2020

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication, Zoom interview with Setha Low, 29/04/2020

skateboarding or playing music, show how this group is disadvantaged in the production of a fragmented social order in which their behaviour is labelled “inappropriate”. In San José, this also occurs at *Parque Francia*, which is a typical gathering place for young people but where recently increased police-presence regulates and restricts the freedom of youth in this urban space.

The local police tweeted the following about this: *We have initiated a security plan for Parque Francia in Barrio Escalante. The spot has become a favourite for dozens of young people and it is necessary to bring order and security! #CapitalPolice* (Rojas, 2020). Previous research points to the fact that youth are an often-disadvantaged group by the transitions in space, mainly due to increased regulation through privatization and securitization. The behaviour of young people is often labelled as disorderly. This phenomenon also frequently manifests in shopping malls, where youth often belong to the *non-spending* public in a culture of consumerism and where they increasingly come into conflict with security guards (Olesen & Lassen, 2012).

Other groups that face an increase in confrontation in public spaces through these forces are mainly street dwellers (Image 15). Previous research points towards the so called “cardboard operations” in which street dwellers were systematically removed from the city centre in order to regenerate downtown San José (Lovell, Arguedas, Montoya , Mora, & Marin , 2013). It is hereby important to mention that covid-19 increases these operations through new sanitary laws: “ *We maintain personnel in security tasks for communities in Hatillo and San Sebastián. In the park of Colonia Kennedy, we remove street inhabitants who do not respect the sanitary closures #Capital Police*” (Municipal police San José, 12/06/2020). The various groups directly and indirectly excluded by transitions in public space in San José are visible in figure 12.



Image 15: Street dwellers and local police  
(Municipal police San José Facebook page, 2020)

## 6.4 Concluding Remarks

The section on securitization has illustrated how the society of San José is saturated with fear and how these feelings of insecurity are embedded and reproduced through legal discourses. Street vendors are emphasized in this regard, both in the Municipal policy document, as in the online reporting of the Municipal police. Hereby, several rhetorical techniques are used, for example by applying loaded sayings and metaphors that negatively portray street vendors, to support arguments made by the police. While the government is trying to “open up the city”, the increasing police-based measures are attributed greater attention and seem to maintain the high rates of perceived insecurity.

This section has furthermore illustrated the importance and influence of the *perceived* dimension of spaces and how the Municipal government aims to bring forward changes in the *lived* dimension through interventions in the *planned* dimension. The effectiveness of these interventions is however questionable, since several of these implementations are based upon how the spaces are perceived by some. Here, a mismatch between the different dimensions seems to occur on a municipal level. Through the policy discourse analysis, it has become clear how the dominant discourse influences urban perceptions and how these perceptions become institutionalised. This leads to a certain vicious discourse-based circle in which certain users are favoured over others. This too can be considered an exclusionary mechanism, as defined in the third sub-question.

The privatization of urban spaces such as *Plaza de la Cultura* has been made possible through the implementation of neoliberal policy measures that have deregulated land markets and allow private investors to increasingly shape urban landscapes. The policy analysis has illustrated how the privatization of the *plaza* has been implemented gradually over a period of more than twenty years. This was done first on paper, after which the renovation of the *plaza* in 2016 marked the physical turning point in publicness and accessibility. In the processes of re-imagining the city and the implementation of EUG, a wide range of measures and mechanisms increase socio-spatial exclusion, such as the establishment of regulations and security mechanisms by private actors. The local government is progressively focussing on competitiveness whereby public space is treated as a driver for economic growth.

Limited attention is hereby given to inclusive space management and equitable distribution of the economic and social benefits of public space. In this context, different space users are considered “inappropriate”. This group includes people whom financially depend on public spaces, such as street vendors and (transsexual) sex workers and other gender-based minorities such as the gay community. Other groups include street dwellers, street artists and youth. This creates a fragmented social order of space users and the activities they are engaged in.

## 7. Discussion

This chapter aims to critically substantiate the contribution of this study to the existing debates on public space. It discusses similarities and differences between the literature and empirical findings and aspects of the debate of urban public space as a “commons”. This is followed by a short section on the results in relation to the field of Development Studies. Following, a reflection on how the biases and omissions have potentially influenced the results is provided. Lastly, a number of policy implications are given based on the knowledge and experiences gained for the purposes of this study.

### 7.1 Theoretical and Empirical Similarities and Differences

Based on the findings of this research, certain groups have been defined who are specifically disadvantaged in San José by the transitions taking place in public space. As explained earlier, one of these groups can be broadly described as the persons whom financially depend on public spaces in order to maintain their livelihoods, like street vendors, street artists and sex workers. Furthermore, the findings point to the fact that the productions of space in San José are gendered; in terms that certain gender-based groups are affected more than others. Sex workers and especially transsexual sex workers are disadvantaged in their ability to use central public spaces as their workspace due to increased regulation and exposure. This increase in exposure has also chased away the gay community that previously gathered often at the *Plaza de la Cultura*.

These findings thus point to the fact that space transitions hit gender-based minorities harder due to their non-conformability with the dominant standards, which causes them to be labelled as “inappropriate” space users. The same is true for the group of youth, whose mainstream activities are commonly considered to be non-social and disorderly, this also correlates with existing literature (Olesen & Lassen, 2012). However, one of the main targets of sustainable development goal 11 sets out the target to “provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” (UN Habitat, 2016, p. 9). The emphasis on certain groups and the narrow gender-based definition are controversial, as they a priori seem to consider some groups to be more important or more noteworthy than others. It is incomprehensible that this definition puts the stakes of children above those of youth and the stakes of women above those of other gender identities.

Besides this inconsistency, many findings are in line with existing research. For example, Crossa points to street vendors’ spatial strategy of mobility, in which vendors in Mexico-City constantly walk while selling, in order to avoid confrontations with the police (Crossa, 2009). Interestingly, at *Parque Central*, all vendors make use of this strategy except for the shoe shiners. The streets surrounding *Parque Central* are sometimes occupied by vendors who use small rugs to display goods, while vendors in *Parque Central* usually walk around with big bags filled with sellable goods. This probably has to do with the more severe police intervention in the park compared to the adjoining street.

## 7.2 Urban Public Space as a Commons?

It is interesting to comment on the debate around urban space as a commons, as this is a point of discrepancy that was encountered during the literature study of this research. While some consider urban public space as one of the most typical examples of a contemporary commons (van Lindert & Lettinga, 2014; Harvey, Kihato, & Skinner, 2018), others think it is incorrect to classify urban public space as a commons since it is most often inherently state property. In a sense, this research has also been a quest for the appropriateness of the use of the label “commons” for urban public spaces and for the political, social and policy-related consequences of its application.

Hereby, both the questions of what classification is most accurate in the context of San José, as well as the question of what the most desirable classification is, should be asked. Garnett explains how she considers urban public space a commons due to the limited ownership rights of local governments over public space on the basis of a number of examples of lawsuits considering the use of public space that were lost by local governments due to the assertion of certain rights enshrined in the constitution (Garnett, 2012). The same argument can be made in San José, since the BCCR once lost a lawsuit against street vendors who were then granted the right to use the *Plaza de la Cultura* for vending<sup>18</sup>. This definition is however very context-dependent since the rights concerning the use of public space vary per state and period in time.

The literature study furthermore reveals how reports on public space that have been brought forward by NGOs are often more oriented towards a rights-based approach in which urban public space is seen as a commons that should be accessible to everyone and especially to those whose livelihoods depend on an equitable allocation of public space. It furthermore makes the case that regulated rights to public space for informal workers is a key pathway to inclusive cities (van Lindert & Lettinga, 2014; Harvey, Kihato, & Skinner, 2018). This angle is similar to the one of Lefebvre in which the importance of having a right to the city is expressed (Lefebvre, *The production of space*, 1991). Although there is much to be said for this perspective, Ribot and Peluso propose a different definition in the closely related debate concerning the term “access”. They explain how they define “access” as “the ability to derive benefits from things” instead of “the right to benefit from things” (Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

They do this in order to bring attention to a wider range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). This approach is closer to that of Kohn, who subtly refuses to use the term “commons” to refer to public space. She acknowledges the rhetoric of the commons as a powerful critique towards the privatization of public space but also points to the fact that the term commons can legitimately be applied to forms of joint ownership that are still extremely elitist and exclusive since it refers to a resource to which anyone *within the relevant community* has a right.

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<sup>18</sup> Personal Communication, Zoom Interview with Setha Low, 29/04/2020

She thus expresses the need for a language that helps to distinguish between apparently similar forms of collective ownership, that have very different social and political effects (Kohn, 2004). The use of the term commons as a critique against the privatization of public space is a valuable stance within this research and within the cases of *Plaza de la Cultura* and *Parque Central*. The symbolic power of expressing the right to the city for all users should not be undermined. However, the assertion of this symbolic right has proved to be insufficient in the case of San José. Street vendors and other “inappropriate users” whose livelihoods are disrupted through transitions in public space in San José should be granted more tangible tools and compensations methods in order to be able to maintain their livelihoods.

### **7.3 Reflection in Relation to the Development Studies Field**

This research forms part of the broader societal development debate on the different dynamics that take place in urban contexts. It is encapsulated in on-going processes of socio-spatial change and is linked to the elite-oriented urban transformations that have played and still play a central role in social and symbolic struggles in, and over, Latin American cities (van Noorloos & Steel, 2017). However, the spatial transitions in public space through privatization, disneyfication and securitization are taking place in cities all over the world. The production of *city-losers* is therefore not an uncommon phenomenon.

The findings of this research furthermore represent broader changes in urban governance, in which the role of hybrid (public-private) planning regimes have become more common in cities worldwide. Low-income urban residents are hereby often perceived to stand in the way of progress. A danger in these elite-oriented planning regimes lies in a further exclusion of the informal sector, especially since half of the global workforce is informally employed (Harvey, Kihato, & Skinner, 2018). The socio-geographical hierarchy in urban areas therefore poses major challenges to the societal development field. Particularly because the wide range of stakeholders further complicates finding and applying positive and inclusive change.

### **7.4 Critical Reflection on Research Results**

Concerning the omissions of this research, it is inevitable to conclude that the covid-19 outbreak has affected this study. The fieldwork period was roughly halved in time, which has resulted in a smaller collection of field data. The street interviews that took place generated interesting data and although this has been a rich contribution to this research, it also evokes the question of what it could have been like with a doubled amount of time. That being said, the alternative research method of policy discourse analysis that was added for that reason has provided a comprehensive perspective through an interesting combination of methods, which has proved to be a valuable contribution to this study.

What is regrettable, however, is the fact that the original research plan, in which *Plaza de la Cultura*, *Parque Central* and mall *San Pedro* were to be studied, had to be



adjusted due to lack of time. An ethnographic study of this mall would have added another perspective concerning the user patterns in a less public and accessible urban space. Malls are typical examples of post-urban spaces that in some ways replace other urban spaces, such as squares and parks. It would therefore have been interesting to compare this space with the other two included case studies in terms of publicness, accessibility and exclusion. It is relevant to consider a future and urban landscape in which all functions that originally belonged to urban public spaces are transferred to malls and other post-public spaces and to reflect on what would remain of the livelihoods of “inappropriate” post-public space users like street vendors in such a scenario.

It is relevant to imply a certain degree on nuance to the outlined municipal policies. The analysed municipal development plan consists of 190 pages, of which a limited amount is discussed in this study. It is therefore inevitable that some themes and policy aspects are emphasized more than others, such as, for example, security. This may provide an incomplete or skewed view of the existing policies. It is therefore important to mention and to stay aware of this. This does not alter the fact that the discussed policy aspects are taken directly from the analysed document and that it is stated in the document itself that security is currently the most important policy aspect in San José. In addition, it would have added value to perform a number of interviews with municipal employees, in order to hear more about their side of the story. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the short fieldwork period. Contact was made via e-mail, however, very little response followed here.

## **7.5 Policy implications**

This research has explored and discussed different problematical realities concerning public space in the GAM and in more detail in downtown San José. Most of these problems are multifactorial, and/or structural, which makes the providence of policy implications complex, to say the least. However, on the basis of this study, several suggestions that are rather straightforward can be made. One problematical reality has to do with the fact that the social impact of public space on citizenship, safety, social cohesion and health has been ignored for a long time. Since municipalities in the GAM are all individually responsible for the policy and budgeting of their public spaces, coherence is lacking and under execution happens more often than not.

Richer municipalities, like San José, dispose of more resources to support and manage public spaces, which may lead to “over-management” characterized by “intelligent totems” and continuous cleaning crews, while public spaces in other municipalities are ignored and become deteriorated. Central governmental planning based on convincing research could ensure more coherence between public spaces in different municipalities. This could reduce the uneven development of public spaces, in which some places become over-controlled while others deteriorate. National central authorities could do this together with two leading NGOs, which are already responsible for most of the research on public spaces in Costa Rica, called Semillas and Fuprovi. Such collaboration could also ensure the comprehensive representation of

different interests in managing spaces next to only the economic ones, in which public space is seen as a marketable commodity.

Since cantons in Costa Rica are individually responsible for managing their public spaces, the central government, e.g. the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN) could, in cooperation with the NGOs, issue advisory reports on this subject for each canton. This would furthermore allow research to be carried out to address the circulation problems currently experienced by pedestrians in the city centre, as well as more research into the current amount and activities of street vendors in public spaces. Especially because the actual development plan indicates that there is currently no insight into the number of street vendors and -occupants (Municipalidad de San José, 2017). “Placemaking” (UN Habitat, 2016) can and should hereby be taken into account as an important aspect in managing public spaces. Such an approach would be a valuable opportunity for Costa Rica to take a step towards becoming the strong social democracy that it used to be, showing that, in addition to the importance of a strong economy, it also recognises that a fair distribution of resources.

Next to policy suggestions on a national level, some implications can be made that concern micro level aspects. On the basis of the findings of this study it can be concluded that the Municipal police of San José plays a role in the establishment of negative perceptions towards street vendors through the spread of fear and irritations in the community. The polices’ approach in online reporting through Facebook is unprofessional and unconstructive. It most likely aggravates existing feelings of xenophobia and spreads unjustified levels of fear, which further stimulates a withdrawal from the public sphere. It presumably counteracts the local municipality’s attempts to make public spaces vibrant again through the organisation of cultural and social events. It is therefore advisable for the municipality of San José to advise the local police to stop reporting in this way and focus more on encouraging respectful interaction among different members of society.

The combat of the police against street vendors is one that has been going on in San José for a long period of time already. The current approach is ineffective in the creation of safe and inclusive public spaces. The police's focus on combating street vendors in central public spaces is also likely to lead to a lack of security in decaying public spaces that receive no attention because they are of no economic importance, for example because tourists do not visit these areas. According to representatives of Semillas, there is an increase in violence against women in less central spaces where there are no or few people <sup>19</sup>. The current approach therefore also seems to divert attention from spaces where more police presence can actually have an added value. Further research into the range of triggers of perceived insecurity is also recommendable, in order to avoid future latent effects of security interventions.

It would therefore be useful to think of a different approach for various reasons. This could be done by empowering street vendors, for example through collaborations

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<sup>19</sup> Personal communication, interview with Sofía Suarez Zúñiga at the Architectural faculty of the University of Costa Rica, 10/03/2020

with shop owners or through trainings for street vendors that address their rights and responsibilities. Further research is needed in order to provide more well-founded consultation on this matter. The New Urban Agenda as established by the UN in 2016 that works for sustainable urban development aims to leave no one behind and has recently included public spaces as an essential factor in this programme. Although it is a step in the right direction, it is also clear that these objectives do not currently provide sufficient real outcomes for vulnerable groups in urban areas. This is not surprising, as it has only recently been put on the agenda. Further global development of this programme is therefore essential.

## 8. Conclusion

This research has aimed to contribute to the identification of direct and indirect mechanisms and less apparent forms of urban exclusion in order to acknowledge and perhaps challenge them. Two spaces have been thoroughly studied on the basis of three sub-questions in order to answer the following research question: “*To what extent does the transition from public to post space public in San José goes hand in hand with socio-spatial exclusion?*” As a result, more knowledge has been gained on both the management of spaces in transition, as well as on the drivers and consequences of these transitions. Findings of this research point to the presence of three main drivers, which each in a particular yet overlapping way facilitate mechanisms leading to the exclusion of certain groups in San José’s society.

These drivers; privatization, disneyfication and securitization, are not unique to the context of San José, but manifest in their own way in the case studies discussed. The primary posed sub-question addresses the physical characteristics of the spaces. Answering this question has illustrated how physical aspects such as high-end design, lack of facilities and security camera systems influence the user patterns of urban spaces and exclude certain types of users indirectly. The third sub-question addresses other, less apparent aspects that lead to the exclusion of user groups. Hereby, it became clear how increased police control directly excludes street vendors. Furthermore, privatization has allowed legal instruments to put restrictions on the use of the plaza by vendors, artists, press, priests, protestors and youth.

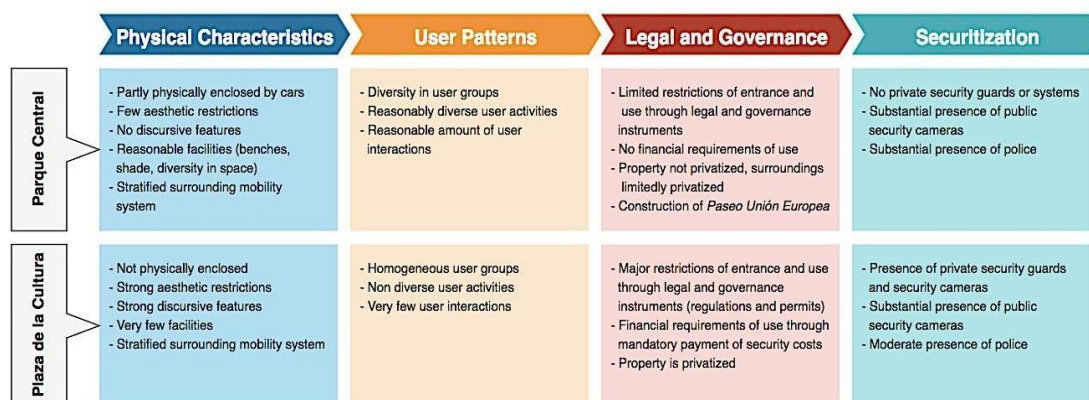


Figure 13: Schematic representation of the user patterns and the physical characteristics, legal and governance instruments and manifestations of securitization at *Parque Central* and *Plaza de la Cultura* that influence the publicness and accessibility in both spaces.

These exclusionary characteristics and mechanisms are more prominently present at the *Plaza de la Cultura* compared to *Parque Central*. This more advanced stage of transition is reflected in the less diverse and vibrant user patterns at the *plaza*, which is illustrated in answering the second sub-question concerning the patterns in uses at both spaces. A summary of these findings is displayed in figure 13. It can therefore be concluded, on the basis of the findings of this study, that the transition in public space in San José significantly contributes to socio-spatial exclusion of several groups.

This research further demonstrates how the publicness of spaces should be perceived upon a grey scale. A variety of aspects contribute to an increased or decreased degree of publicness and accessibility. More research into the different approaches of management of spaces in transition is needed in order to find more inclusive approaches in which spatial and behavioural control do not overshadow social, political and democratic functions of public spaces. Lastly, this research has reflected upon the different dimensions in the production of space, as established by Lefebvre. Policy makers should make an effort to comprehensively understand all three dimensions of the spatial triad in order to be able to bring forward successful interventions that lead to sustainable and inclusive space management.

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## 10. Appendix – Interview guide

### Guía de entrevistas Querine Kommandeur

#### Introducción

Gracias por tomarse el tiempo para hablar conmigo hoy. Esta investigación se está llevando a cabo para conocer hasta qué punto la transición del espacio público al espacio pospúblico va de la mano de la exclusión de individuos o grupos. Me llamo Querine Kommandeur y actualmente estoy escribiendo mi tesis en la Universidad de Utrecht y en la Universidad de Costa Rica.

Todo lo que me diga se mantendrá en confidencialidad y la información no se compartirá con nadie más que el equipo de investigación. Además, usted permanecerá totalmente anónimo, lo que significa que nadie sabrá quién es usted, así que siéntase libre de hablar libremente. *Ya ha dado su consentimiento para la entrevista con el formulario de consentimiento. A continuación*, me gustaría pedirle su aprobación para que grabe esta entrevista con mi teléfono para poder escucharla de nuevo. Por último, si no quiere responder a una determinada pregunta o si quiere dejar la entrevista, por favor, no dude en hacérmelo saber en cualquier momento.

#### Preguntas iniciales

- ¿Qué edad tienes?
- ¿En qué barrio vives?
- ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación más alto?
- ¿Qué haces hoy en este lugar?  
Probe: trabajar, esperar, comprar, relajarse

#### Preguntas claves

- ¿Con qué frecuencia visita este lugar cada mes?  
Probe: 1 a 5 veces, 5 a 10 veces, 10 a 20 veces, 20 a 30 veces
- ¿Cuál es su principal motivación para visitar este lugar?  
Probe: relajarse, interactuar, tomar el sol, ir de compras, razones prácticas
- ¿a qué lugares alternativos se puede ir para esta actividad? ¿Tú también vas allí? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Cómo describiría su experiencia de estar en este lugar?  
Probe: alegre, agradable, relajado, (in)cómodo, vigilante, inseguro, explique por qué se siente así
- ¿Te sientes bienvenido en este lugar? Por favor, explique.  
Probe: nadie te molesta, hay bancos, relacionarse con las obras de arte, gente (in)amigable, vigilancia policial, cámaras filmando...

- ¿Cómo describiría sus interacciones con otras personas en este lugar?  
Probe: casi nunca, a veces, a menudo, amigable, corta, de apoyo, fría, vulgar, superficial, práctica
- ¿Qué gente te gusta ver en este lugar y qué gente preferirías no ver en este lugar? Por favor, explique.  
Probe: todos son bienvenidos, personas sin hogar, vendedores ambulantes, drogadictos, niños, jóvenes, ancianos, mujeres, seguridad, diversidad
- ¿Crees que hay gente que no se siente bienvenida aquí? Por favor, explique.  
Probe: mujeres, personas sin hogar, ancianos, niños, turistas, vendedores ambulantes, jóvenes, discapacitados...
- ¿Crees que todo el mundo tiene derecho a estar aquí? Por favor, explíquese.  
Probe: todos son bienvenidos, sólo los ciudadanos, sólo si se comportan bien, no si afecta a la seguridad, no en todo momento.

#### **Preguntas finales**

- ¿Puedes decirme algo que te guste de este lugar y algo que no te guste de este lugar?  
¿Explicar?  
Probe: apariencia, seguridad, costos, instalaciones, ubicación, atmósfera...
- ¿Hay algo que cambiarías de este lugar si tuvieras el dinero y el poder para hacerlo?  
¿Explica por qué?  
Probe: instalaciones, campos de deporte, accesibilidad, naturaleza, seguridad
- ¿Tiene alguna pregunta que me quede?  
Probe: incertidumbres, procedimientos, motivación, tema relacionado