



Forms of production, appropriation and spatial practices in public space in popular neighborhoods of Manizales, Colombia

Formas de producción, apropiación y prácticas espaciales en el espacio público de barrios populares de Manizales, Colombia

Research Article

2026 July - December

versión original (ES)

MARÍA FERNANDA ABADÍA-VANEGAS Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia
mabadiav@unal.edu.coLINA MARÍA ZULUAGA-GIRALDO Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia
lmzuluagag@unal.edu.coTANIA GIRALDO-OSPINA Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia
tgiraldoo@unal.edu.co

ABSTRACT The forms of production and appropriation of recreational and sports public spaces (PS) in popular neighborhoods of Manizales, Colombia, and the role of everyday practices in its social construction are examined. A multiple case study with a comparative approach was conducted in the Nuevo Horizonte commune, which included three units of analysis derived from a layered inventory of georeferenced information: conceived, self-managed, and co-managed public spaces. Cartographic and regulatory reviews were combined with fieldwork through systematic observation, semi-structured interviews, and life histories. Various spatial practices were identified that reveal tensions between formal planning and community production. The findings show that, beyond their origin, these spaces are transformed into common places through everyday appropriation and collective care, although they remain traversed by tensions and disputes over use and control. It is concluded that these forms of public space production highlight the need for more flexible and participatory planning approaches, in accordance with the socio-spatial dynamics of working-class neighborhoods.

RESUMEN Se analizan las formas de producción y apropiación del espacio público (EP) recreo-deportivo en barrios populares de Manizales, Colombia, y el papel de las prácticas cotidianas en su construcción social. Se desarrolló un estudio comparativo de casos múltiples en la comuna Nuevo Horizonte, que incluyó tres unidades de análisis derivadas de un inventario en capas de información georreferenciada: EP concebido, EP autogestionado y EP cogestionado. Se combinó revisión cartográfica y normativa con trabajo de campo, mediante técnicas como observación sistemática, entrevistas semiestructuradas e historias de vida. Se identificaron diversas prácticas espaciales que revelan tensiones entre la planificación formal y la producción comunitaria. Los resultados muestran que, más allá de su origen, estos espacios se transforman a través de apropiación cotidiana y cuidado colectivo, aunque atravesados por tensiones y disputas por el uso y control. Se concluye que estas formas de producción del EP evidencian la necesidad de enfoques de planificación más flexibles y participativos, de acuerdo con las dinámicas socioespaciales del hábitat popular.

KEYWORDS public space, popular habitat, community self-management, right to the city, spatial practices

PALABRAS CLAVE espacio público, hábitat popular, autogestión comunitaria, derecho a la ciudad, prácticas espaciales

Received: 18/10/2025
Reviewed: 06/03/2026
Accepted: 12/03/2026
Published: 10/06/2026



Cómo citar este artículo/How to cite this article: Abadía-Vanegas, M., Zuluaga-Giraldo, L., y Giraldo-Ospina, T. (2026). Formas de producción, apropiación y prácticas espaciales en el espacio público de barrios populares de Manizales, Colombia. *Estoa. Revista de la Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo de la Universidad de Cuenca*, 15(30), e6357. <https://doi.org/10.18537/estv015.n030.a14>

1. Introduction

Public spaces (PS) in working-class neighborhoods in Latin America play a fundamental role in community life and the shaping of neighborhood identity. They are spaces socially constructed through everyday practices, community interactions, and disputes over use and recognition. The PS is not a harmonious environment but a place marked by tensions, power relations, and forms of control that reveal structural inequalities (Delgado, 2015). In working-class contexts, these disputes take on a particular dimension, as the space is produced in tension with institutional planning and is constantly redefined through community practices (Mitchell, 2003; Segovia and Oviedo, 2000). Analyzing PS in working-class neighborhoods is key to understanding how communities produce the city from below, negotiate their legitimacy, and shape their own forms of appropriation and management.

Manizales, a mid-sized city located in central-western Colombia, exhibits diverse forms of urban space production, revealing the coexistence of two logics in the configuration of the SP: the institutional, linked to state housing programs; and the community-based, derived from collective occupations and self-construction of housing. These dynamics reveal how these spaces become settings for social cohesion, cultural expression, and community regulation, as well as for conflict and dispute.

The central question guiding this research is to understand how recreational and sports public spaces are produced and appropriated in working-class neighborhoods of mid-sized cities, and how everyday practices shape forms of management, social meanings, and the consolidation of these spaces for community use, in tension with institutional planning. These sites were selected because they are considered nodes of concentrated spatial practices, allowing for a situated analysis of their production. Sidewalks, streets, street corners, and interstitial spaces were not included, although they are equally relevant; they respond to a different scale and logic that exceeds the scope of this research.

The objective is to analyze the forms of production of the SP through the identification and comparison of conceived, self-managed, and co-managed spaces, with an emphasis on everyday practices, the actors involved, and the power relations implicated in their social construction. Dynamic configurations shaped by negotiations between the community and institutions are taken into account. To this end, the analysis integrates a historical dimension of urbanization processes and the regulations associated with the verification of the inventory and typology established for these spaces during the period 1975–2024, complemented by an everyday dimension through recent fieldwork (2023–2024). In this way, the study contributes to debates on

SP in working-class neighborhoods by shifting the emphasis from formal production toward the social processes that make it a lived, contested, and shared space.

The analysis engages with Latin American studies on working-class urbanization and neighborhood appropriation processes (Di Virgilio, 2013; Rodríguez et al., 2007; Torres, 2011) that allow the SP to be read as a socially produced dynamic space where memories, conflicts, and collective projects, interwoven with everyday practices (Burbano, 2014; Da Fonseca et al., 2019; Hernández Bonilla, 2008; Hernández García, 2013; Sorda, 2015; Velarde Herz, 2017).

From this perspective, this work aligns with approaches that conceive of space as a social production (Lefebvre, 2013), shaped by power struggles and power relations (Harvey, 1977, 2013; Mitchell, 1995, 2003; Soja, 1996, 2008, 2014). It also engages with recent works that understand the SP as a potential commons (Stavrides, 2022). In this way, the vision of technically planned space is expanded to a shared good, built through practices of collaboration and collective care, where the public becomes the commons.

2. Conceptual framework

The SP is a social phenomenon, produced and reproduced through collective practices, relationships, and meanings (Lefebvre, 2013), where three forms converge: 1) space conceived by experts, 2) space as a product of the symbolic meanings and appropriations of its inhabitants, and 3) space as a product of practices, which include the material dimension. This allows us to understand the SP as a spatiality in constant tension between institutional projects, meanings, and social practices.

This is key to analyzing public spaces in working-class neighborhoods, where ways of inhabiting and using space frequently transcend normative categories and reveal alternative ways of producing the city. Furthermore, public spaces are essential for reducing the risks faced by vulnerable communities because they are places of social interaction, the strengthening of local identity, and mutual support among neighbors (Asadollahi Asl Zarkhah et al., 2025).

However, this social dimension of the SP does not imply that it is a harmonious space. Various critical contributions conceive of the space as a field of contention, where power relations, social inequalities, and everyday forms of resistance play out (Harvey, 1977; Mitchell, 1995, 2003; Soja, 1996, 2008, 2014). From the perspective of these authors, the SP is a territory marked by conflicts over access, use, tenure, and control, where institutional urban planning projects clash with situated social practices.

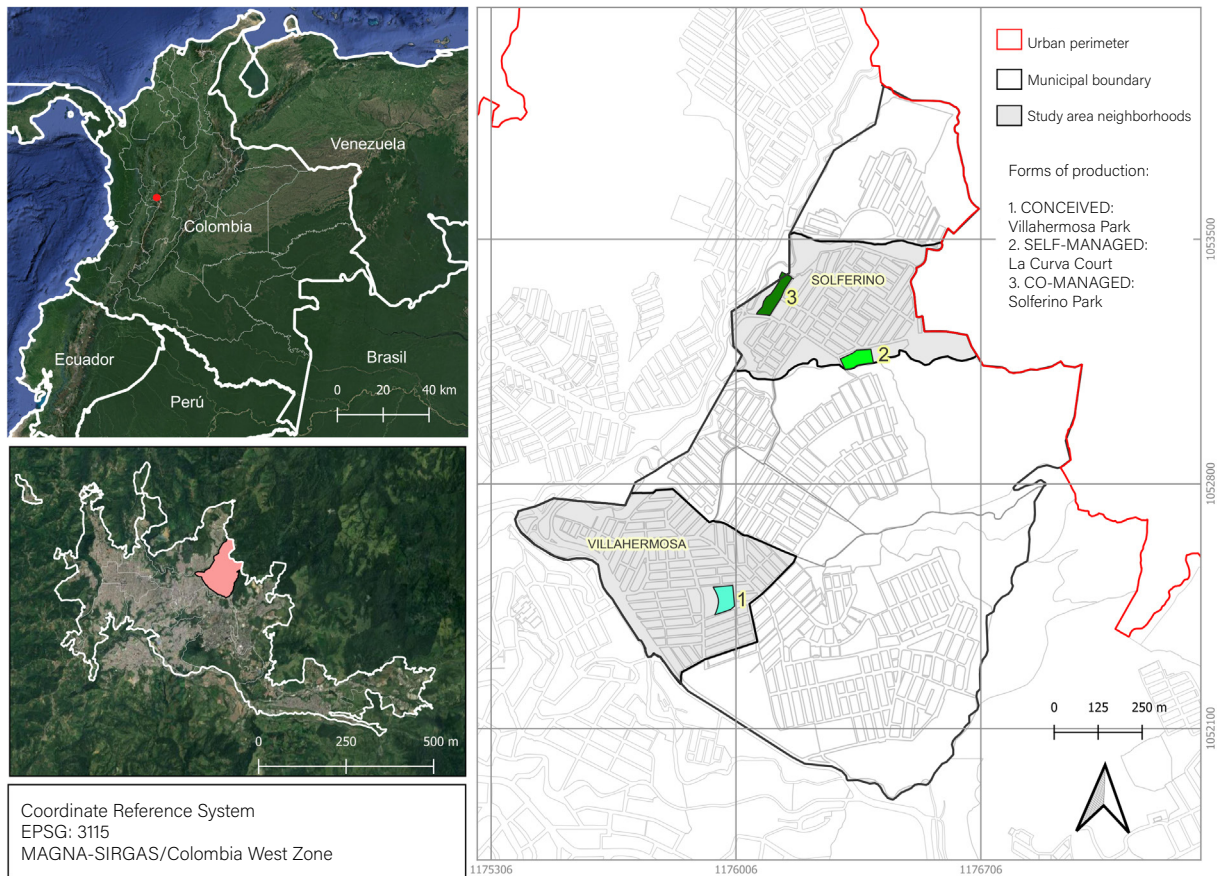


Figure 1: Location of the Nuevo Horizonte District, selected public spaces. Manizales Mayor's Office (2023)

Delgado (2015) notes that the public space cannot be understood as a harmonious setting for coexistence. Far from being a neutral space, it is a site of friction. As a place of power and resistance, the public space has also reflected society with all its inherent challenges and conflicts (Madanipour, 2023). Thus, conflict is not a deviation from order, but a constitutive part of its production.

In this sense, the PU is configured as a site of negotiation between formal regulations and social practices that emerge from everyday life. In addition to being urban infrastructure, it is a space where rights are contested, appropriations occur, and different ways of making the city are produced.

From this perspective, the public space can also be understood as a potential commons. Beyond its legal character and in accordance with Stavrides (2022), the common space is defined by the practices of communalization that produce and sustain it; it emerges when the rules of use, access, and care are collectively negotiated and redefined. This allows us to understand that the public sphere can become a commons, to the extent that its forms of management can be questioned and transformed

by social practices. Within this framework, the SP in working-class neighborhoods is a potential commons, where practices of collaboration, care, and everyday appropriation create the conditions for its transformation. The commons does not appear as an idealized category, but as an unfinished process, marked by constant tensions and negotiations between community and state actors.

In this vein, the appropriation of space is central to the production of the working-class habitat. When a space is perceived as one's own, it becomes imbued with meaning, integrating itself as a representative element of identity and an area of free access for neighborhood gatherings and the enrichment of the social fabric (Segovia and Oviedo, 2000; Vidal and Pol, 2005). In working-class neighborhoods, solidarity networks work to build social life in open spaces, which are often the result of self-management strategies essential for consolidation and integration into the urban fabric.

Disputes in the public space become legitimate expressions of the social production of space, where residents act as active agents in the construction of the city (Di Virgilio, 2013; Rodríguez, 2017; Torres, 2011).

Thus, the everyday practices that transform the SP are forms of appropriation and everyday resistance that reconfigure the meanings and functions assigned institutionally (Harvey, 2013; Mitchell, 2003; Soja, 2008).

Based on this conceptual framework, the analysis of the differentiated forms of public space production in working-class neighborhoods is approached through analytical categories constructed from the dialogue between theory and empirical work, as follows:

Conceived public spaces emerge in the process of formal urbanization, a phenomenon that reflects the legal intervention of public areas for common use. However, following Lefebvre's (2013) spatial dialectic, these spaces are transformed by everyday practices and meanings.

Self-managed SP are grounded in the notion of the social production of habitat (Di Virgilio, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2007; Torres, 2011) and the notion of potential commons (Stavrides, 2022). They emerge as a direct expression of neighborhood residents' participation in shaping their territory, through the appropriation of land for the provision of public services, urban slopes, protected areas, and even private property.

They emerge from practices and are consolidated through processes of appropriation and shared meaning, becoming spaces of communalization.

Co-managed SP are conceived from the critical perspective that views space as a field of contestation (Delgado, 2015; Harvey, 2013; Mitchell, 2003; Soja, 2014). They are intermediate configurations where community action and institutional planning are articulated; originally self-managed, they later receive recognition and formalization from the municipal administration. Over time, these interventions are transformed by the community, acquiring other urban uses and functions (Pérez-Valecillos and Castellano-Caldera, 2013). This form of social production unfolds within a field of negotiation and dispute, where norms and practices come into tension depending on the capacity for action of its inhabitants and their right to co-produce a just city.

These three categories allow for an analysis of SP in working-class neighborhoods based on their mode of production, the ways in which they are appropriated, and the type of relationship established between the community and institutions, recognizing that these are not closed categories but, in all cases, dynamic processes marked by tensions and transformations.

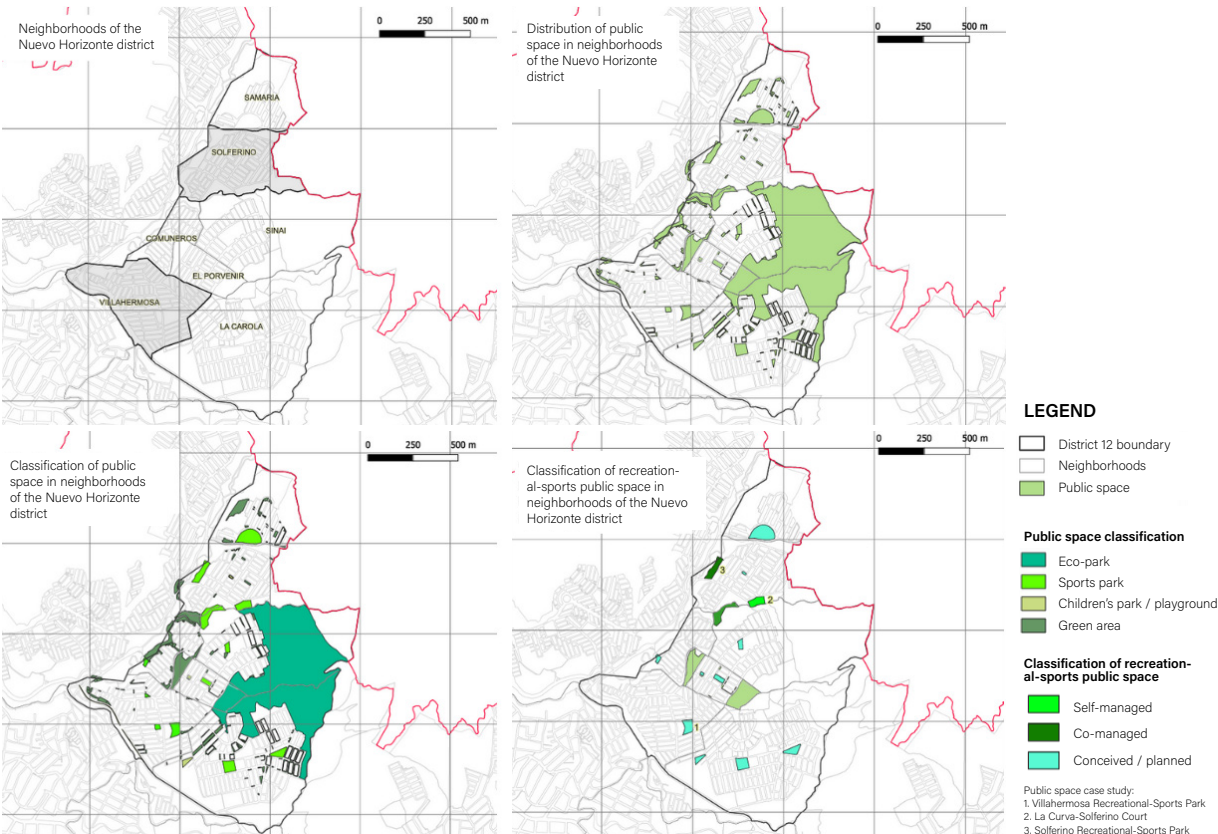


Figure 2: SP Inventory, Nuevo Horizonte Community, Manizales. Manizales City Hall (2023)

3. Methods

This study was conducted using a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018) of a comparative and explanatory nature, employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and spatial analysis. The study examined social practices and historical processes associated with the production, transformation, and appropriation of public space in working-class neighborhoods in the Nuevo Horizonte district of Manizales between 1975 and 2024 (Figure 1).

To ensure analytical comparability, three representative units of analysis were selected (Figure 1): Villahermosa Park, La Curva Sports Field, and Solferino Park. The selection was based on purposive sampling aimed at identifying cases that represented the three forms of PE production analyzed in the study. Each case demonstrates distinct forms of production and management, which allowed for a comparison of their origins, modes of appropriation, and relationships with institutional frameworks.

The analytical categories were constructed by cross-referencing the theoretical framework with the empirical work through a methodological process developed around two complementary dimensions: a historical-normative one and an everyday one.

The historical-normative dimension (1975–2024) focused on reconstructing the processes of urbanization, physical transformation, and institutional regulation of the analyzed spaces. The historical reconstruction was carried out using documentary sources, maps, local press, and residents' accounts, taking into account the founding moments of the Villahermosa and Solferino neighborhoods, as well as physical transformations and institutional and community interventions in the analyzed study areas. This analysis was complemented by a cartographic and regulatory review through the updating and verification of the inventory based on the cartography available on the Manizales Mayor's Office open data geoportal (2023), processing and verifying the information with the free software QGIS® through field surveys. Areas of formal origin, their regulatory classification, and their incorporation (or lack thereof) into the land-use plan were identified, as well as officially unregistered self-managed areas, in order to select the three case studies (Figure 2).

The everyday dimension (2023–2024) was developed through fieldwork aimed at understanding the spatial practices and dynamics of SP appropriation. Systematic non-participant direct observation was conducted, recording everyday practices, uses, and appropriation dynamics at different times of the day (morning, afternoon, evening), including weekends and weekdays. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 key actors selected through purposive sampling (Hernández Sampieri and Fernandez-Collado, 2014). To ensure

diversity in terms of gender perspective, age range, and daily relationship with the space, the following were included: community leaders (primarily women), long-term residents, merchants, and mothers who are caregivers. Additionally, life stories were developed for three residents who played leading roles in the construction and defense of these places (two women and one adult man), selected for their community involvement, in order to understand disputes and negotiations associated with the use of the space.

The triangulation of techniques and sources allowed for the cross-checking of territorial, documentary, and testimonial information, strengthening the interpretive consistency of the results. Qualitative analysis was conducted through open coding, identifying recurring practices in interviews, life stories, and observation records. The comparative analysis allowed for the identification of particularities and common patterns in the forms of production, appropriation, and management of the SP.

4. Results

An analysis of the history and regulations of the spaces covering the time period between 1975 and 2024 revealed distinct yet comparable trajectories: from initial technical provision and/or community occupation to the stabilization of use and, finally, to their consolidation as neighborhood social infrastructure. The cases analyzed correspond to neighborhoods with distinct urban trajectories: Villahermosa, which emerged from state housing planning in the 1970s; Solferino, which originated around 1976 through processes of public land occupation driven by popular movements (Torres, 2011); and was subsequently legalized around 1980.

4.1. Case 1: Villahermosa recreation and sports park (conceived)

Villahermosa Park was conceived as part of a low-income housing program in the 1970s. From its inception, the space was designed within the formal layout of the development as an area designated for recreation and leisure. Its central location and unique presence in the landscape quickly established it as a spatial landmark for the area (Figure 3).

Today, this park is a hub for recreational and sports activities, particularly mini-soccer, which define daily life in the area, as expressed by Marulanda, a neighborhood resident: "This park is very important because it's the only space where kids can play and do sports, away from bad influences" (Marulanda, personal communication, June 10, 2023). These activities serve as a strategy for community regulation and youth socialization in the face of issues perceived as risks to this population.

In this regard, community leaders organize tournaments and sports academies as a way to channel the free time of children and young people. These activities combine care, community control, and social cohesion.

Nighttime commercial activities were also identified, where informal vendors find an opportunity for livelihood, according to the account of a local vendor: "I come here every night with my hot dog cart because it's the only place where I can work" (Vendor, personal communication, June 15, 2023). At night, the park takes on a different dynamic; this use introduces tensions related to noise and the occupation of the park, although it also expands its economic and social function. The coexistence of sports, commercial, and residential activities reveals friction surrounding control of the space.

Additionally, maintenance and beautification efforts are undertaken by the community and, in some cases, in collaboration with the municipal administration and other institutions. The community participated in the "Barrio Mío, La Ruta del Color" program promoted by the Manizales Mayor's Office (2018), which included painting murals and restoring areas of the park. Cleanup days, painting projects, and minor improvements—such as planting and maintaining small gardens—also take place sporadically (Figure 3). This demonstrates that residents shape the space through a process of cooperation, via collective care and transformation.

In 2021, the municipal administration carried out infrastructure maintenance work (playground and sports field).



Figure 3: Villahermosa Park. (2024)



Figure 4: La Curva Court. a) Authors (2024). b) Huellas de Vida Community Foundation (2018)

A community leader stated in an interview: "The sports field has always belonged to the neighborhood, but if we don't take care of it, no one else will. When they came to fix it, we were the ones who insisted" (Community leader, personal communication, June 10, 2023). This testimony demonstrates that institutional intervention and the maintenance work carried out by residents occur as a continuous interaction between formal planning and community demands. Thus, even in the case of an SP originally conceived as such, specific practices of shared management can be observed that redefine the rigid separation between formal planning and community action, which is intersected by demands and disputes.

The map in Figure 3 shows the park's current layout, where the court appears as the structuring core. The accompanying photographs illustrate the court's use as a neighborhood gathering space and the community maintenance efforts, highlighting the active appropriation of the SP.

From the perspective of spatial triadics (Lefebvre, 2013), this case demonstrates that the conceived, the practiced, and the lived do not operate as separate dimensions. The park was conceived institutionally, but its continued existence and current significance result from the sports, commercial, and care practices that reconfigure it on a daily basis. The conflict over noise, community pressure for maintenance, and economic appropriation show that the conceived space is in constant tension due to uses and meanings that go beyond the institutional design. This case demonstrates that even conceived spaces can become sites of active appropriation and negotiation, where formal planning and community action are continuously intertwined.

4.2. Case 2: La Curva de Solferino sports field (self-managed)

La Curva Sports Field (Figure 4), which emerged from a community initiative around 2010, established itself as a self-managed space to reclaim an unused plot of land following a landslide that destroyed several homes in 2007. In this case, the organizational component that characterizes the residents' actions stands out. It is not merely a matter of community practices; rather, it was organization and consensus that enabled the creation of the space, which is indicative of the community's capacity for organization. Don Rafael Hurtado, a community leader, recounts: "On that field, there was nothing but brush, so the neighbors organized to fill the hole with soil taken from other construction sites and begin building the soccer field".

The transformation of the site was not the result of an institutional intervention, but rather a gradual process of adaptation: leveling the ground, installing makeshift goals, and informally marking the playing field. The field emerged as a community response to a neglected space that was perceived as unsafe.

A caregiver notes: "Before, that place was scary—it was just brush. Now at least there are people, there are games, the kids come to play..." (Caregiver, personal communication, June 15, 2023). This account reveals that self-management involved not only physical construction but also the creation of symbolic security. The space went from being an empty space associated with risk to becoming a place of collective presence.

The practices observed at La Curva go beyond strictly athletic use (Figure 4); it also hosts community celebrations, collective maintenance work, and domestic activities extended to the SP, such as cooking at neighborhood events (Table 1).

Regulation of use does not stem from formal regulations but from implicit agreements among neighbors: organizing tournaments, collective care of the grounds, and agreed-upon schedules. However, these agreements are not without tensions. During fieldwork, disputes over the use of the space were recorded, including conflicts between youth and adults over the prolonged occupation of the playing field and complaints about alcohol consumption at sporting events. These tensions demonstrate that self-management does not equate to harmony, but rather to constant negotiations.

Self-managed spaces emerge as a spontaneous expression of the community in shaping its environment (Figure 4), beginning with the occupation of land and construction of houses (private space)—guided by local knowledge—and then moving on to define community (public) spaces. The latter emerge as residual areas within the environment, recognized by residents as suitable places for recreational and social activities, regulated by the community itself through agreements.

La Curva is an expression of the social production of habitat, emerging from practice (practiced space), imbued with collective meaning (lived space), and subsequently entering into dialogue with institutional frameworks. Its development has been marked by internal disputes, material precariousness, and a constant search for legitimacy. In this case, the triad manifests in a manner opposite to that of the planned park; here, the space was not institutionally designed but rather as a community project that subsequently seeks formal recognition. The tension here lies between established practice and potential formalization.

Unlike the other cases, at La Curva, the absence of initial institutional intervention meant that the construction, maintenance, and regulation of the space depended on the community organization. This allowed for greater flexibility in uses and the ability to adapt to residents' needs, though it also led to material precariousness and the need for ongoing agreements to manage conflicts.

4.3. Case 3: Solferino Park (co-managed)

Solferino Park (Figure 5), according to accounts, was initially appropriated by residents as a community space during the neighborhood's land occupation (1976), legalized along with the neighborhood (1980), and subsequently intervened upon and improved

by the municipal administration (2016), establishing itself as an example of co-management. María Patiño, a long-time resident, recounts: "This space began as the neighborhood's washing area, due to its proximity to the Guamo stream. But over time, due to conflicts among neighbors over its use and demands from other users for different activities, it became a soccer field and a tejo court" (Patiño, personal communication, June 15, 2023).

The transition from laundry area to sports field was neither linear nor consensual; it involved disputes over the purpose of the space, as some advocated for its traditional use related to water, while others pushed for its conversion into a sports facility. The consolidation of the SP as a neighborhood gathering place led to community requests for its maintenance. Through municipal intervention, furniture, paths, and a children's play area were added; the soccer field was upgraded; and a basketball court was built, formalizing what had previously been an informal space.

During fieldwork, it was observed that currently, the park combines recreational, sports, cultural, and commercial activities (Figure 5), as well as shared management processes: the municipal administration handles major infrastructure, while residents organize cleanup days and garden maintenance (Table 1).

	Conceived Villahermosa Park / 3,464 m ²	Self-managed La Curva Court / 3,413 m ²	Co-managed Solferino Park / 4,123 m ²
Scale	Community	Neighborhood	Community
Year of construction	1980	2010	1976 (self-managed) 1980 (legalized) 2016 (renovated)
Time to establish itself	1 year	4 years	3 years (legalization) 26 years (improvement)
Social leader	Laura Pamela Álvarez	Rafael Hurtado and María Restrepo	María Patiño
Identified spatial practices	Recreational sports Commercial Maintenance Meeting	Sports recreation Meetings, gatherings, and celebrations Household Maintenance	Sports Recess Culture and Recognition Commercial Maintenance
Key features	Primarily for sports, with complementary social uses	Sports, residential, festive, and commercial.	Recreational and social character predominates.
Domestic activities	Space for everyday socializing; no direct domestic practices are evident.	Highly visible, associated with the extension of private life (cooking, hanging laundry)	Family gatherings and relaxation
Sports activities	Soccer and mini-soccer as the central focus.	High intensity, tournaments, and neighborhood matches	Children's games, individual exercises, and community and city-wide tournaments
Commercial activities	Adaptation of the space for nighttime commerce	Organized sales at sporting events and activities to raise funds	Adaptation of space for commercial use
Festival practices	Community-organized cultural events	Main venue for community celebrations	Local and seasonal activities
Care practices	Community cleanup days. Maintenance by the municipality	Collective organization for maintenance	Beautification by residents. Infrastructure maintenance
Community role	Ownership and advocacy for maintenance	Material production, regulation, and care	Initial community production + Institutional regulation and production
Institutional role	Initial provision and maintenance	Minimal presence	Formalization and Regulation

Table 1: Case studies by forms of production, ways of inhabiting the SP, and type of management. (2024)



Figure 5: Solferino Park, (2024)

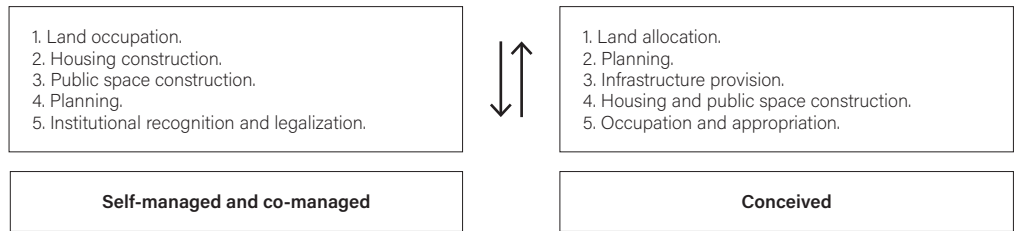


Figure 6: Different Logics in the Production of SP. (2024)

However, formalization did not eliminate tensions. Some residents point out that, following the municipal intervention, new rules of use emerged that restricted traditional practices. One resident stated: "It's prettier now, but there are more rules and we can't play tejo anymore..." (Patiño, personal communication, June 15, 2023). Such statements demonstrate that co-management is a field of ongoing negotiation.

This is an example of the dialectic between community-driven spatial production and regulated urban planning, without eliminating power asymmetries. Solferino Park demonstrates that co-management is an unstable process where physical improvement, regulatory oversight, and community appropriation coexist in constant tension.

4.4. Cross-sectional comparison: forms of production and spatial practices

Analysis of the selected cases allows for the identification of common patterns, differences in modes of production, intensity of practices, and forms of community management. Villahermosa Park achieved near-immediate functionality upon its construction. In contrast, La Curva required approximately four years of progressive adaptation through community work, and Solferino Park consolidated its current configuration following a process of appropriation and institutional intervention (Table 1).

This temporal difference reflects technical forms of production and distinct processes of social legitimation. Thus, in self-managed and co-managed public spaces, consolidation involved internal negotiation, disputes over use, and the progressive construction of agreements.

Five types of spatial practices were identified: (1) recreational and sports-related, (2) domestic, (3) commercial, (4) gatherings, meetings, and celebrations, and (5) maintenance and beautification. These practices appear in all three case studies with varying degrees of intensity, depending on the mode of spatial production and the level of institutional involvement. In Villahermosa, sports, commercial, and maintenance practices predominate. In La Curva, in addition to sports practices, domestic and festive practices are highly visible. In Solferino, a greater diversity and overlap of practices is observed.

These places take on forms of production that adapt to the needs and activities of their inhabitants. This analysis allows us to identify two simultaneous logics in the production of the SP, which correspond to the modes of operation of formal and informal urbanization (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2014). Figure 6 summarizes these two logics: in the institutional (formal) production of SP, the process begins with land allocation and technical design, followed by urban development works, the provision of infrastructure, and housing construction, and then moves on to social appropriation. In contrast, in self-managed and co-managed spaces, the process is reversed: it begins with the community's occupation of the land and the progressive construction of their homes; subsequently, collective practices lead to the definition of spaces for gathering and recreation, as well as urban development works, which over time may be regularized.

Regardless of the origin and mode of production of each space, in the end, all have been reconfigured by everyday practices that strengthen community appropriation, neighborhood identity, and social cohesion. As Silveyra (2024) points out, community identity integrates urban, social, and cultural elements that intertwine in daily life, reinforcing what it means to be part of a community. This identity, in turn, is nourished by shared memory, citizen participation, and community networks (Santamaria-Hernández, 2018).

The comparative analysis shows that in all three cases, tensions arose regarding the use, control, and regulation of the space. These tensions primarily occurred among neighbors, occasional users, informal vendors, and, in some cases, between the community and the local administration. In Villahermosa Park, conflicts arise due to nighttime noise resulting from the presence of informal vendors. At La Curva Sports Field, internal disputes have been identified regarding the use of the space, the organization of events, and the control of alcohol consumption during celebrations, which requires ongoing community agreements. In Solferino Park, institutional intervention introduced new rules and restrictions that altered previously more flexible dynamics, leading to tensions between neighborhood autonomy and formal regulations. Taken together, these cases show that appropriation does not

eliminate conflict but rather reorganizes it, confirming that the SP operates as a setting of constant negotiation where interests, practices, and forms of regulation—disputed on a daily basis—are brought into tension (Table 1). Regarding levels of management and relations with institutions, the comparison reveals three distinct degrees.

These forms of SP production involve different levels of community and institutional management (Table 1). In Villahermosa, residents were primarily involved in maintenance, beautification, commerce, and gathering, while in La Curva, the community played a leading role in the creation, management, and preservation of the space. In Solferino, participation remained active even after the institutional intervention, highlighting the community's ability to maintain its identity and symbolic ownership.

In all three cases, what is conceived, practiced, and experienced do not operate as successive and isolated stages, but as simultaneous conditions in constant tension, where municipal administration, the daily practices of users (neighbors, athletes, children, young merchants), and the symbolic meanings constructed by the community interact. In Villahermosa, the conceived space is constantly challenged by practices that go beyond its initial function. In La Curva, the practiced space precedes any formalization, and shared meanings are constructed. In Solferino, subsequent legalization does not replace prior appropriations, but rather reconfigures their meanings and partially regulates already established uses. The comparison shows that the production of the SP does not depend exclusively on its formal or informal origin, but on the interaction between form, practice, and meaning, where planning, everyday life, and symbolic experience intertwine in a dynamic process marked by tensions and conflicts.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the types of practices reveals that public spaces in working-class neighborhoods are not limited to their material function; they are recreated as lived spaces (Lefebvre, 2013) through everyday actions. Recreational and sports practices respond to leisure needs, shaping settings for youth socialization and community regulation. Domestic and maintenance practices demonstrate how activities of daily life—such as household tasks—are transferred to the public space, expanding its use as a venue for community interaction and expression, which Vidal and Pol (2005) refer to as processes of symbolic appropriation. Similarly, cultural, commercial, and social practices strengthen neighborhood ties, turning these places into hubs of socialization that consolidate neighborhood identity (Segovia and Oviedo, 2000).

5.1. Tensions in the production of the public square

An analysis of the forms of SP production reveals a complex process that challenges traditional conceptions of urban planning and the use of urban space. This is manifested in the coexistence of formal and informal practices and the interaction between these practices, the spatial representations of authorities, and spaces of representation laden with meaning for the community. The tension between institutional planning and community appropriation leads to interpreting the SP as a continuous and dynamic construction that reflects the adaptations, resilience, and resistance characteristic of Latin American working-class neighborhoods.

The findings of this research show how the boundary between the formal and the informal in the production of the SP is a zone in constant negotiation and transformation, as a continuous process of adaptation, which allows them to maintain openness, flexibility, and an unfinished character, understood as a way of creating, undoing, and remaking places (Kamalipour, 2023). An example of this is co-managed spaces, such as Solferino Park, which become a heterogeneous assemblage where community initiatives, initially informal (self-managed), subsequently gain institutional recognition without losing their original character.

This perspective follows Roy's (2005) approach to informality—not as an anomaly, nor as the opposite of formal planning, but as a mode of urbanization in countries of the Global South. Furthermore, it aligns with Robinson's (2006) proposal regarding the concept of "ordinary cities," who argues that all forms of urbanization should be considered equally valid and worthy of study.

5.2. Appropriation, conflict, and production of the commons

The commons emerges through practices that negotiate the use, access, and care of the SP (Stavrides, 2022). In Villahermosa, the conceived SP becomes a commons to the extent that neighborhood practices redefine its initial function. In La Curva, the commons precedes formalization and is produced through collective action. In Solferino, co-management shows that institutionalization does not eliminate the commons, but rather reconfigures it under new regulatory conditions.

In this way, dynamics specific to low-income housing emerge in vulnerable contexts, where domestic, recreational, and community life intermingle in the open space, strengthening community bonds and care networks, which consolidates the SP as a relational space, beyond its physical design (Miranda Gassull, 2017; Rivas-Martínez and Bailey-Moreno, 2021).

This interpretation allows us to understand that communalization is an unfinished process, marked by tensions and disputes. Although spaces like La Curva are not officially recognized, they enable practices of gathering, recreation, celebration, and maintenance that socially legitimize them and integrate them into the urban system. From this perspective, the commons does not constitute a harmonious sphere, but rather a conflict-ridden production that articulates appropriation, negotiation, and regulation through a community agency that interacts with institutional structures without being subsumed by them.

5.3. The political dimension of inhabiting

Practices surrounding the SP become tactics of inhabiting (De Certeau, 1999; 2000) that transcend their recreational function to become forms of political action and a claim to the right to the city. Self-management in La Curva allows for the dignification of the territory while simultaneously demanding rights and contributing to the reduction of urban inequality through a bottom-up approach (Molina-Betancur and Martínez-Herrera, 2022); neighborhood pressure for maintenance in Villahermosa and regulatory negotiation in Solferino demonstrate that the use of public spaces constitutes a situated form of this political action.

The right to the city (Harvey, 2013; Lefebvre, 1978) is expressed not only through formal demands but also through the everyday production of space. The extension of domestic practices into the public sphere blurs the boundaries between the public and the private (Vidal and Pol, 2005); it materializes this political dimension by blurring boundaries, a phenomenon also documented in other Latin American contexts (Vallejo-Robalino et al., 2024; Zuluaga, 2021) as forms of everyday resistance and resilience.

According to Bayat (2000), these actions are ordinary forms of urban agency, not necessarily organized as formal movements, but transformative and persistent nonetheless. Thus, inhabiting becomes a political practice when it reinterprets norms, contests uses, and produces alternative meanings in the SP.

5.4. Implications for urban management

The results invite a rethinking of urban planning paradigms, showing that SP in working-class neighborhoods are laboratories of territorial innovation. The diversity of practices and meanings identified in the three cases highlights the need to develop flexible forms of planning capable of recognizing the coexistence of technical design, local knowledge, and everyday practices.

The analysis shows that SPs in these neighborhoods are drivers of social capital and builders of citizenship (Uría, 2001). Co-managed SPs demonstrate that formalization strengthens material conditions without eliminating community agency. This requires governance models that recognize the unfinished nature of space.

Experiences such as community soccer schools or the co-management processes observed in Solferino demonstrate that local partnerships can become strategies for urban improvement and well-being (Aguirre-Arango and Loaiza-Zuluaga, 2014). In the case of Manizales, Peralta-Duque and Villegas-Guzmán (2020) highlight the need to strengthen a public policy on public space use based on social participation.

In this sense, recognizing participation in the production of public space promotes more adaptable planning in line with cultural, temporal, and symbolic variations (Schroeder, 2022). In these neighborhoods, it may be appropriate to draw on collective, non-commercialized logics of space (Vallance et al., 2025) that address specific needs and strengthen other forms of maintenance and financing.

This implies rethinking urban planning interventions so that designers and other urban space professionals consider the spatial requirements of the self-built city, incorporating a vision of justice for social transformation (Ortiz et al., 2025).

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study offers a nuanced understanding of contemporary urbanization, particularly in the context of the Global South. Furthermore, it challenges prevailing notions of appropriate urban development and opens new avenues for research on the practice of SP planning and management in low-income contexts. The dynamics presented show that the formal or informal origin of the public space does not determine its subsequent use. What ensures its permanence is the repetition of practices that generate community recognition. However, this appropriation is not harmonious; tensions arose: conflicts over noise and nighttime occupation, internal disputes over the type of activities, and subsequent restrictions on use. In this sense, the public square in working-class neighborhoods is not a harmonious setting of cohesion, but a commons whose day-to-day management is sustained by continuous negotiation. At the theoretical level, this work strengthens the understanding of the production of urban space as a complex socio-spatial process, where formal and informal, institutional and community logics intersect and create tension.

The ways in which the SP is produced have reflected its residents' struggle to redefine their territory and challenge the stigmas of unsafe neighborhoods associated with their communities' ways of life. Through self-management strategies, everyday practices, and the building of connections, residents have transformed these spaces into sites of transformation and resilience, fostering social life, a sense of belonging, and the right to inhabit the city on their own terms in areas where land is often the subject of constant disputes.

This study focused on the most representative social practices identified through observation, interviews, and narratives, which presented some limitations; however, these do not invalidate the results obtained but rather position them as an interpretive contribution based on three cases comparable to similar urban contexts. Future research could

incorporate methodologies such as intergenerational memory to delve deeper into the transmission of knowledge and community continuities.

7. Acknowledgments

To the National University of Colombia for funding the project: Production, Transformation, and Management of Urban Space and Infrastructure, code HERMES 64762. To the Master's Program in Habitat at the National University of Colombia for the development of the thesis: Social Production of Public Recreational and Sports Spaces in Low-Income Neighborhoods. To the community actors as co-constructors of knowledge.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

© **Copyright:** María Fernanda Abadía-Vanegas, Lina María Zuluaga-Giraldo, Tania Giraldo-Ospina, 2026

© **Edition copyright:** *Estoa*, 2026.

8. Bibliographic references

- Aguirre-Arango, D. F. A., y Loaiza-Zuluaga, Y. E. L. (2014). Espacios recreativos formales: Escenarios para la construcción de los valores sociales. *Plumilla Educativa*, 13(1), 11–28. <https://doi.org/10.30554/plumillaedu.13.396.2014>
- Alcaldía de Manizales. (2018). *Evento: La ruta del Color*. https://www.facebook.com/CiudadManizales?locale=es_LA
- Alcaldía de Manizales. (2023). *Geoportal*. Gestión de Información Geográfica - Planeación Municipal. <http://geodata-manizales-sigalcmzl.opendata.arcgis.com>
- Asadollahi Asl Zarkhah, S., Hartevelde, M., Van Dorst, M., & Adlakha, D. (2025). The socio-spatial roles of public space as an enabler for community resilience. *URBAN DESIGN International*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-025-00288-1>
- Bayat, A. (2000). From 'Dangerous Classes' to 'Quiet Rebels': Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South. *International Sociology*, 15(3), 533–557. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026858000015003005>
- Burbano, A. M. (2014). *La investigación sobre el espacio público en Colombia: Su importancia para la gestión urbana*, 31, 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.12804/territ31.2014.08>
- Da Fonseca, A., Frantchez, J., López, N., Reherrmann, F., Rodríguez, A., y Soto, G. (2019). Espacios públicos barriales y acción colectiva: Un acercamiento conceptual. En *Territorialidades barriales en la ciudad contemporánea*. Universidad de la República.
- De Certeau, M. (1999). *La invención de lo cotidiano 2. Habitar, cocinar*. Universidad Iberoamericana.
- De Certeau, M. (2000). *La invención de lo cotidiano 1. Artes de hacer*. Universidad Iberoamericana.
- Delgado, M. (2015). *El espacio público como ideología* (2a ed.). Catarata.
- Di Virgilio, M. M. (2013). *Producción social del hábitat. Abordajes conceptuales, prácticas de investigación y experiencias en las principales ciudades del Cono Sur*. Café de las Ciudades.
- Fundación Comunitaria Huellas de Vida. (2018). *Evento: Campo deportivo La Curva. Un sueño de oportunidades*. https://www.facebook.com/huellasdevidamanizales?locale=es_LA
- Harvey, D. (1977). *Urbanismo y desigualdad social*. Siglo XXI.
- Harvey, D. (2013). *Ciudades rebeldes. Del derecho a la ciudad a la revolución urbana*. Ediciones Akal. S.A.
- Hernández Bonilla, M. (2008). Procesos informales del espacio público en el hábitat popular. *Revista Bitácora Urbano Territorial*, 13(2), 109–116. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/748/74811925008.pdf>
- Hernández García, J. (2013). Construcción Social de Espacio Público en Barrios Populares de Bogotá. *Revista INVI*, 28(78), 143–178. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-83582013000200005>
- Hernández Sampieri, R., y Fernandez-Collado, C. F. (2014). *Metodología de la investigación* (P. Baptista Lucio, Ed.; Sexta edición). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Kamalipour, H. (2023). Shaping Public Space in Informal Settlements: A Case Study. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3781. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043781>
- Lefebvre, H. (1978). *El derecho a la ciudad*. Ediciones 62 s/a.
- Lefebvre, H. (2013). *La producción del espacio*. Capitán Swing Libros, S. L.
- Madanipour, A. (2023). *Rethinking Public Space*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800884588>
- Miranda Gassull, V. (2017). El hábitat popular. Algunos aportes teóricos de la realidad habitacional de sectores desposeídos. *Territorios*, (36), 217–238. <https://doi.org/10.12804/revistas.urosario.edu.co/territorios/a.4440>
- Mitchell, D. (1995). The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 85(1), 108–133. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1995.tb01797.x>
- Mitchell, D. (2003). *The Right to the City Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (1a edición). Guilford Press.
- Molina-Betancur, J. C., y Martínez-Herrera, E. (2022). Sentido Comunitario de la Coherencia en asentamientos informales: Aprendizajes y reflexiones desde Medellín (Colombia). *Hacia la Promoción de la Salud*, 27(1), 52–66. <https://doi.org/10.17151/hpsal.2022.27.1.5>
- Ortiz, C., Franco Calderon, A. M., Millan Franco, G., & Jaramillo Diaz, I. (2025). Spatialising intersectionality: An approach to public space design in self-built neighbourhoods in Cali, Colombia. *URBAN DESIGN International*, 30, 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-024-00267-y>
- Peralta-Duque, B. del C. P., y Villescas-Guzmán, L. M. V. (2020). Significados sociales e institucionales de uso del espacio público. *Kepes*, 17(22), 109–139. <https://doi.org/10.17151/kepes.2020.17.22.5>
- Pérez-Valecillos, T., y Castellano-Caldera, C. E. (2013). Creación del espacio público en asentamientos informales: Nuevos desafíos urbanos. *Bitácora Urbano Territorial*, 23(2), 95–104. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/748/74830874012.pdf>

- Rivas-Martínez, H., y Bailey-Moreno, J. (2021). Aportaciones del fútbol en la formación infantil y juvenil en una comunidad vulnerable (Soccer contributions to child and youth training in a vulnerable community). *Retos*, 39, 276–283. <https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v0i39.78491>
- Robinson, J. (2006). *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. Routledge.
- Rodríguez, A. (2017). *Guía de gestión de las autoridades de policía en la implementación de la Ley 1801 de 2016* (TSV Comunicación Gráfica S.A.S).
- Rodríguez, M. C., Di Virgilio, M. M., Procupez, V., Vio, M., Ostuni, F., Mendoza, M. y Morales, B. (2007). *Producción social del hábitat y políticas en el Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires: Historia con desencuentros*. Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani.
- Roy, A. (2005). Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2), 147–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360508976689>
- Santamaria-Hernández, R. M. S. (2018). Las políticas urbanas y la cohesión social. *Bitácora Urbano Territorial*, 28(1), 151–157. <https://doi.org/10.15446/bitacorav28n1.67726>
- Schroeder, S. (2022). Cities Made by Citizens: Informal Strategies of Public Space Production and Experiences from Piura, Peru. En *Co-production and Public Space: Perspectives and Experiences from Latin American Informal Neighbourhoods* (pp. 44–55). Universidad de Cuenca.
- Segovia, O. y Oviedo, E. (2000). Espacios públicos en la ciudad y el barrio. En *Espacio público, participación y ciudadanía* (pp. 51–69). Ediciones SUR.
- Silveyra, M. (2024). La identidad comunitaria en barrios populares, resistencia desde la cohesión social. *URBE. Arquitectura, Ciudad y Territorio*, 19(2024), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.29393/UR19-2ICMS10002>
- Soja, E. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journey to los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Blackwell.
- Soja, E. (2008). *Postmetrópolis. Estudios críticos sobre las ciudades y las regiones*. Traficantes de sueños.
- Soja, E. (2014). *En busca de la justicia espacial*. Tirant Humanidades.
- Sorda, G. (2015). La producción social del espacio público. En *Construir la ciudad: Miradas, imágenes y debates*. Editorial Universitaria Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia San Juan Bosco. Colección Extensión Serie Sociedad/Política.
- Stavrides, S. (2022). Reclaiming public space as commons: Learning from Latin American movements. *Revista INVI*, 37(106), 24–48. <https://doi.org/10.5354/0718-8358.2022.67215>
- Torres, C. A. (2011). *Ciudad informal colombiana: Barrios contruidos por la gente*. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Bogotá, Facultad de Artes, Maestría en Hábitat.
- United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2014). *Streets as Tools for Urban Transformation in Slums: A Street-Led Approach to Citywide Slum Upgrading*. ONU-Hábitat.
- Uría, J. (2001). Lugares para el ocio. Espacio público y espacios recreativos en la restauración española. *Historia social*, 41, 89–112. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=121394>
- Vallance, S., Carlton, S., & Hoddinott, W. (2025). Urban governance: Public space management and 'what's in common' *URBAN DESIGN International*, 30, 313–326. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-025-00286-3>
- Vallejo-Robalino, D., Ríos-Rivera, I., y González-Plaza, G. G. (2024). Cartografías sociales en contextos de violencia(s): (Des)dibujar fronteras y límites en los barrios populares de Guayaquil, Ecuador. *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 88, 39–57. <https://doi.org/10.7440/res88.2024.03>
- Velarde Herz, F. A. (2017). El espacio público en la ciudad popular: La vida entre laderas. *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'études andines*, 46(3), 471–488. <https://doi.org/10.4000/bifea.8851>
- Vidal, T. y Pol, E. (2005). La apropiación del espacio: Una propuesta teórica para comprender la vinculación entre las personas y los lugares. *Anuario de psicología*, 36(3), 281–297. <https://raco.cat/index.php/AnuarioPsicologia/article/view/61819>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6ª ed.). Sage.
- Zuluaga, L. M. (2021). *El barrio popular autoconstruido como espacialidad de resistencia/re-existencia. Ciudad °otra° en las laderas del sur de Manizales* [Tesis doctoral, Universidad de Caldas]. Repositorio Institucional Universidad de Caldas. <https://repositorio.ucaldas.edu.co/entities/publication/8a1d28eb-1355-40c0-b276-87603b818f29>