




OBSERVING, WEAVING AND PAINTING:

An Ethnography Based
on Imagery to Think
the City

Alba Lucía Cruz-Castillo* 
Alex Leandro Pérez-Pérez** 
Paula Andrea Cifuentes-Ruíz*** 





Date of receipt: September 06, 2024

Date of approval: September 17, 2024

How to cite

Cruz-Castillo, A. L., Pérez-Pérez, A. L. y Cifuentes-Ruiz, P. A. (2024). Observar, tejer y pintar: una etnografía a partir de la imagen para pensar la ciudad, *(Pensamiento), (Palabra)... Y Obra*, (32), e22131. <https://doi.org/10.17227/ppo.num32-22131>

* PhD in Education and Society, PhD in Social Anthropology. La Salle University. alcruz@unisalle.edu.co

** PhD in Technical Sciences (Architecture option). La Salle University. aleperez@unisalle.edu.co

*** PhD in Territory, Urban Planning and Sustainability. La Salle University. pacifuentes@unisalle.edu.co

Abstract

The research article presents two urban experiences from peripheral territories of Bogotá, specifically in the neighbourhoods of El Recuerdo Sur (Ciudad Bolívar) and Las Cruces (Santa Fe). These research/intervention projects were designed through participatory and ethnographic processes, using photography and painting as bridges for a dialogue with communities in a pedagogical exercise aimed at strengthening territorial identity and public space appropriation processes. The article details the methodologies used and how they, through images and creative objects, enable the understanding of the city as a field, object, and social construction that emerges from its representations. The proposed exercises and their development enabled the consolidation of political, social, and cultural structures that subsequently allowed for the recovery and re-signification of urban contexts that have become landmarks and nodes for exchanging experiences. These drive the continuity of various collectives' struggles for the right to the city of minorities and vulnerable communities.

Keywords: ethnography; public space; territory

Observar, tecer e pintar: uma etnografia a partir da imagem para pensar a cidade

Resumo

O artigo de pesquisa apresenta duas experiências urbanas em territórios periféricos da cidade de Bogotá, especificamente nos bairros El Recuerdo Sur (Ciudad Bolívar) e Las Cruces (Santa Fe). As pesquisas/intervenções foram concebidas por meio de processos participativos e etnográficos, mediados pela fotografia e pela pintura como pontes para o diálogo com as comunidades, em um exercício pedagógico voltado para o fortalecimento da identidade territorial e a apropriação dos espaços públicos. O artigo ilustra detalhadamente as metodologias utilizadas e como estas, através da imagem e de objetos criativos, permitem a compreensão da cidade como campo, objeto e construção social que emerge das suas representações. Os exercícios propostos e seu desenvolvimento permitiram consolidar estruturas políticas, sociais e culturais que permitiram posteriormente a recuperação e ressignificação de contextos urbanos, que se tornaram marcos e pontos de encontro para a troca de experiências. Essas impulsionam a continuidade nas lutas de diversos coletivos pelo direito à cidade de minorias e comunidades vulneráveis.

Palavras-chave: etnografia; espaço público; território

Observar, tejer y pintar: una etnografía a partir de la imagen para pensar la ciudad

Resumen

El artículo de investigación expone dos experiencias urbanas desde territorios de borde de la ciudad de Bogotá, específicamente en el barrio El Recuerdo Sur (Ciudad Bolívar) y el barrio Las Cruces (Santa Fe). Estas investigaciones/intervenciones fueron pensadas desde procesos participativos y etnográficos mediados por la fotografía y la pintura, como puente en el diálogo con las comunidades, en un ejercicio pedagógico de fortalecimiento de procesos de identidad territorial y apropiación de espacios públicos. El artículo ilustra, de forma detallada, las metodologías utilizadas y la forma en que estas, mediante la imagen y los objetos creativos, logran la comprensión de la ciudad como campo, objeto y construcción social que emerge desde las representaciones de esta. Los ejercicios propuestos y su desarrollo posibilitaron consolidar estructuras políticas, sociales y culturales que, posteriormente, permitieron la recuperación y resignificación de contextos urbanos que se han convertido en hitos y nodos para el intercambio de experiencias que impulsan la continuidad de las luchas de diversos colectivos por el derecho a la ciudad de minorías y comunidades vulnerables.

Palabras clave: etnografía; espacio público; territorio

Introduction

In urban contexts, where human activities are developed and creative actions emerge to transform them, space is the basic form of materialization to identify not only the needs of individuals and collectives in the territory, but also their expectations for coexistence and appropriation. For this reason, understanding the images and shapes of our environment reveals the cognitive elements that, in both two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality, explain the development of Gestalt principles, modular coordination, and social networks, thereby uncovering their greatest richness and complexity to enhance the creative power of urban users.

Reflecting on perceptions in design, art, or architecture as carriers of content, object, and place, as well as their levels of use and appreciation, is the purpose of this research. These elements serve to enrich the commitments of creative disciplines, fostering changes in the relationships between communities and urban. In the development of the applied methodology, perceptual aspects are explored and experimented with in relation to space and the experience within it, mediated by creative objects made in the dialogue around the feeling and thinking of spatiality through the power of images.

On this occasion, two urban spaces are studied, each in a different state of socio-spatial segregation, highlighting the importance of community work in transforming the dynamics of interaction among social groups and their aspirations to improve urban spaces for a better quality of life. El Recuerdo Sur neighborhood in Ciudad Bolívar (Bogotá), a vulnerable territory resulting from the self-production of habitat and the struggle for the right to the city, allows us to reflect on the possibilities of social and artistic pedagogies in the transformation of urban life. On the other hand, the Las Cruces neighborhood, located in the Santa Fe district within a central urban area of Bogotá, highlights the importance of including and promoting the appropriation of already established spaces as living spaces. These spaces enable diverse forms of interaction and relationships among population groups, fostering the care and improvement of areas dedicated to recreation and leisure.

Both spaces demonstrate that the inhabited space can only be fully understood when it is experienced sensorially, the observation and intervention of the built reality is an

indispensable premise to understand both the architectural elements and their effect on people. Similarly, the role of color and manual labor are not only important expressive elements but also, to a great extent, variables that directly influence the objectives set by communities for the habitability of spaces. These elements impact psychological and associative aspects, contributing to the consolidation of urban strategies and fostering the appropriation and education of individuals and social groups.

This article proposes to describe the elementary aspects of the perception of space, laying the foundations for a first confrontation of the researcher with the social reality. It is not intended to exhaust the problem of built space and its appropriation by the communities, since it encompasses a rich and complex set of cognitive elements, which can only be mastered through a pedagogical exercise based on dialogue with the communities and on the understanding, from there, of popular elements underlying urban life in the peripheries.

This is an opportunity to delve into theoretical discussions about the image and the city, their representation, by applying methodologies rooted in aesthetics and ethnography to understand the characteristics of urban spaces in contexts of exclusion. These methodologies, based on observation, social and urban intervention, and the development of artistic or social appropriation activities in various formats and spaces, offer a revealing projection of the aspirations and efforts of communities in their daily interaction with the reality of their surroundings.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical discussion proposed in this document explores reflections on the role of images in understanding the built environment, as well as the characteristics that shape the recognition of the city as a physical space where experiences, needs, and expectations emerge. It also conceptualizes and identifies alternatives to mediate between the existing and the desired, which implies rethinking urban logics, transforming reality and strengthening social and community networks that promote change, take ownership and motivate its evolution over time.

Thus, it is proposed to delve into two aspects of the discussion: the role that the image assumes in the understanding of the city, especially in vulnerable environments;

and the tools to represent urban contexts that after being used will show interests, objects of recognition and strategies for future intervention.

Image and City

The image can be conceived as an aesthetic tool that comprises an existing object of analysis, whether natural, constructed or developed by the creative action of an individual or collective, which can subsequently be given a valuation. Images have various purposes, depending on the objectives to be fulfilled, among these is the educational function, by stimulating the ability to understand and recognize their everyday environments in various scales or contexts, as well as the ability to reflect on their care or transformation (Rojas, 2017; Llorente, 2000; Rigo, 2014).

Referring to urban contexts, it is considered essential to refer to the theoretical and methodological reflections developed by Kevin Lynch (2015), who studies how environmental images are the result of a bidirectional process between the observer and his environment. This last element determines distinctions and relationships, while the observer, by means of a great adaptability and according to his own objectives, chooses, organizes and endows what he sees with meaning. This highlights the importance of observing the city as an aesthetic object that has implications for the community, and values for public and private interests. In this context, two complementary currents are proposed around the perception of the individual — the first, rational and objective; the second, sensorial and emotional—, and which allow the generation of cultural and social links (Buraglia, P., 1998).

It is evident, then, the importance of characterizing the urban environment to know the territory and objectively highlight the contexts that are likely to generate value for individuals and collectives. It is also essential to select the tools that allow collecting, manipulating and transforming aesthetic objects, in order to extract the sensations and emotions that guarantee the symbolic appropriation of space and that, according to Guzmán (2016), are built from the imaginaries constituted by images that, in addition, become a value judgment that is conferred by the community through a subjective reality.

Representing the City

Every reference to urban space is full of meaning. This construction is called territorialization, a category that encompasses not only the physical space, but also the imaginary production that occurs around the various ways of thinking about the identity of the territory from what is desired. According to Jaramillo (2013),

in the public space, territorialization is established by the relationships that citizens establish around what is their territory and what are its limits. Personal and social territory that expands and contracts according to the types of encounters and the needs of approaching or distancing or avoidance. (p. 28).

From this point of view, we are dealing with socio-anthropological processes as actions that configure an urban body in the process of discovering oneself in the relationship with the inhabited space.



Human beings who inhabit territories have a constant need to reflect on identity and ways of relating according to these identities. Furthermore, they need to symbolize the territory through meaningful elements, which involves giving space to constructed discourses, lived struggles, and the issues addressed in the environment. The territory, as it is enunciated, has both a linguistic and imaginary dimension; similarly, it is a physical entity, as it can be traversed, traced, and marked. It becomes a space that merges with the representational act that gives it place and form, filling it with meaning narrated in the past, present, and future. The imaginary perception of the territory is, therefore, the result of a symbolic form based on the social construct that is applied to real citizens.

We can point out that the imaginary and the symbolic are or are presented as fields of the subjective reality of individuals; and, for now, for what is of interest in this work, we will say that we understand the symbolic as the cultural expression of the imaginary; the imaginary uses the symbolic to manifest itself. (Jaramillo, 2013, p. 32).

In this imaginary and intersubjective construction, the city is represented in forms and semantics that in turn establish different mediations for inhabiting spaces, which translate into spatialities or narratives of the city. Imagining the city, then, is a subjective and collectivized action of projective actions of space and its forms of inhabiting it. Photography and the aesthetic intervention of space, in this sense, operate as mediations between the inhabited territory and the imagined territory. Both are traces or gestures of physical or immaterial features that derive from human action and are provided with the imaginary condition. For Del Rio (2022),

the footprint is represented as a vestige, which remains as a witness in the territory, to illustrate the consequences of a series of economic and social processes that have altered the landscape through the constructions that remain and mark the place, nuancing its history and form. (p. 29)

Moreover, this trace can be materialized in photographs or physical-spatial interventions that reconstruct a landscape view of the territory.

Photography and physical-spatial interventions, in the specific case of this research, were discursive and pedagogical anchors to dialogue from community and popular actions on the images of the neighborhood, the traces and vestiges that the territory has left and the projective ways of imagining it as a better place. The photographic still image has a great potential in pedagogical processes, since it is a mediation that contemplates emotional, mobilizing and identity didactic processes, in relation to the territories and the constructed meanings of the same. For its part, the artistic intervention in the spaces is also denoted as an expression of image construction that represents the city. In this sense, Delgado, Robledo and Márquez (2016) state:

In this teaching-learning process, the image [...] acts precisely as a vehicle of pedagogical mediation, from which contents, learning activities, etc. are transmitted. Historically, the image has served as a support to increase the effectiveness of pedagogical work ...because it objectifies teaching and activates intellectual and cognitive functions, as well as helping to guarantee the essential assimilation of information for the scaffolding of meaningful learning. (p.112)

From the above premises, the present research assumes the relationship between the construction of image, the representation of the city and the methodological bet of thinking ethnography as the bridge to put these elements in dialogue.

Methodology

Aesthetic and Ethnographic Approaches to Understanding Public Space

This research has an ethnographic methodology. It is particularly situated in urban ethnography, understood as:

a specific way of producing social theory, which especially aims to question the naturalized and consolidated ways of constructing analytical objects in social sciences. Precisely for this reason, “ethnographies of the urban” not only refers to the possibility of studying urban life but also encourages us, by doing so, to rethink the boundaries and contents of “the urban.” (Noel y Segura, 2022, p. 13)

The ethnography allowed the establishment of a dialogue with the community of El Recuerdo Sur neighborhood and Las Cruces neighborhood, based on three fundamental elements: the right to the city, public space, and the social appropriation of the territory. These elements made possible an encounter with the community, which is particularly located in peripheral sectors of the city of Bogotá. It is worth noting that El Recuerdo Sur is situated on one of the city’s edges, while Las Cruces is a historic neighborhood that emerged after Historic Center of Bogotá, forming part of its early peripheries.

This distinction could be considered a differentiating factor between the two neighborhoods; however, it highlights similarities in their population origins, as they share characteristics of socio-spatial and economic segregation. This segregation is even more pronounced in El Recuerdo Sur due to its more recent development compared to Las Cruces. Las Cruces was officially recognized as a neighborhood through Agreement 20 of 1890, as a result of the integration of creoles, indigenous people, mestizos, and poor and working-class communities, following the construction of the Nuestra Señora del Carmen parish.

Both in historic and recent neighborhoods, the periphery is a welcoming territory for displaced, migrant and impoverished populations who constantly struggle for land, dignity of life, social recognition and visibility, in a social space in which the conditions of the margin make them invisible in the face of claims and welfare bets.

According to Hernández (2007), this situation places the territory as a

conflict scenario, but also a scenario of life and future proposals. “Territory is the space appropriated and valued —symbolically and/or instrumentally— by human groups”. Territory in urban popular sectors is very important, almost more than in other contexts, however, it has the same tensions as others; on the one hand, the uprooting produced by globalization and technologies, on the other it is the object of identity and attachment. (p. 12)

The peripheral or vulnerable territories have developed in conditions of marginality, and have evolved hand in hand with social struggles and demands for decent living conditions. In these processes, they have explored popular aesthetics, those produced from their daily life, which obey to resistances in their territory; that aesthetics are also related to the ways of living the space, of going through it and of moving through it (Mandoki, 1994; Rodríguez-Plaza, 2000). This aesthetics has an anthropological component that must be read from the territory and that, traditionally, has been excluded. It is an urban aesthetic, which also unfolds in the narratives of the dreamed spaces, which were traversed from the ethnarrative constructed from transects walked collectively.

The action of walking is a process of appropriation of the territory that goes through the perception of sense of space and everything that is lived in it, a matter that is recognized by organizations that deal with the analysis of territories through this collective mediation, as is the case of Caminando el territorio (cited by Cepeda López, 2020), which states:

walking has favored the construction of our own interpretation of the territorial realities of our municipality. We have discovered what, for us, is one of the main structural problems of the territorial crisis we suffer, the best option to understand territorial realities, but also to recognize ourselves as agents of change. In this way, we have been discovering its ecological and cultural values, as well as analyzing and critically reflecting on its territorial potentialities and conflicts.

Walking and narrating the territory was the foundation for engaging with the inhabitants of the two peripheral neighborhoods mentioned in this text. A mediation that contributed to the encounter through photography, embroidery, and intervention in public space, understanding that as the territory is narrated, its dynamics, demands, historicity, and perspective are also recreated. The community support through this strategy was mediated by future narratives —what we dream of for public space— which created a meeting point.

In El Recuerdo Sur neighborhood, the intervention in the public space focused on the construction of a park, using photo ethnography and embroidered fabric; in Las Cruces neighborhood, the ethnographic look was made from the use of painting and the participatory intervention of the public space. As a whole, the methodology integrates a process described in the following figure.

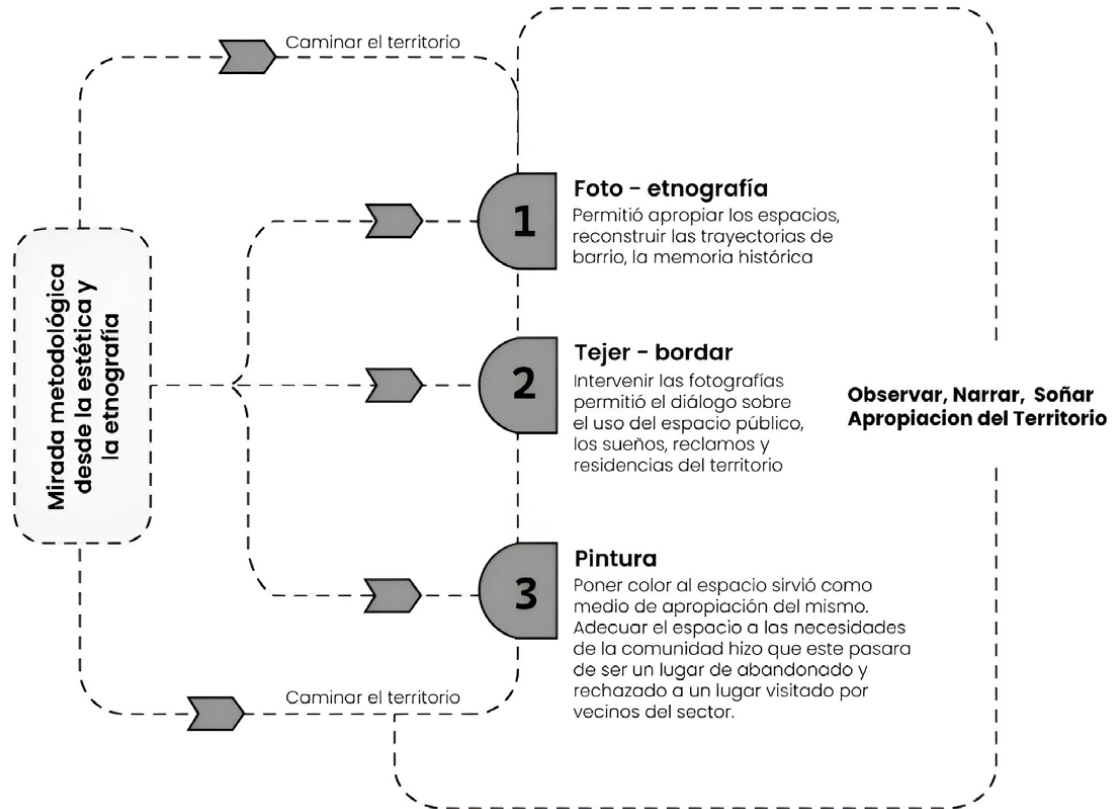


Figure 1. Methodological view from aesthetics, ethnography and painting.

Fuente: own elaboration.

Findings and Results

As a result of applying the proposed methodology, the following experiences are presented: “Observing and Weaving: Photo ethnography as a Reading of Social Dynamics,” which took place in the context of El Recuerdo Sur neighborhood, and “Painting to Dream and Appropriate Public Space,” carried out in Las Cruces neighborhood alongside the community.

Observing and Weaving: Photo Ethnography as a Reading of Social Dynamics

The walked transects were documented through photographs. This methodological strategy, known as photo ethnography, is understood as a means to analyze images —whether explicitly created with an ethnographic intention or not— to obtain data about different cultural groups. Thus, once photography is elevated to the

status of a source, it becomes essential to consider it with the same critical rigor as written documentation or oral testimonies. (Gurbindo Gil, 2019, p. 363)

Photography enabled the exploration of territorial perceptions from the perspectives of the various actors involved in the research and intervention dialogue (researchers and neighborhood inhabitants), along with the narratives of place they shared.

This process began with a group of women convened through the Local Administrative Board (JAL), which facilitated the initial meetings to explore narratives about the place. Subsequently, this initial

group of four women was joined by fifteen others who, in conversations not mediated by the JAL and encouraged by informal neighborhood social organizations and some NGOs, were inspired to engage in dialogue about the territory, the photographs, and the lived and embodied experience of the territory they inhabit daily. Some men joined these spaces at different times during the meetings, most of them social leaders interested in talking about what was happening in the neighborhood. Although it was a scenario primarily for adults, it incorporated the look of care in some embroideries intervened by the children.



Figure 2. Embroideries created by neighborhood residents over photographs of the territory.

Source: Photographs and embroideries created by members of the PAZS.O.S Research Group from Universidad de La Salle and neighborhood residents, engaging in dialogue about the technique to be implemented.

Photographs Embellished with Embroidery and Perceptions of the Territory

After several days of dialogue with members of the community about more than fifty significant images for the inhabitants of the neighborhood, more than thirty photographs were selected and printed. The embroidery incorporated conversations and reflections on the place, its history, meaning, and commitment to the participatory evolution of the territory. Some results are shared below, as well as the narratives extracted from the ethnographic exercise based on the image and its context.



Narrative: For some a house, for others the constant struggle for land in a country of violence, exclusion and marginality (Neighborhood inhabitant).

Figure 3. *Embroidering the self-production of habitat and their right to the city.*

Source: Photographic archive of the author.



Narrative: Here I dream not only of hanging my clothes but also of flying kites. (Neighborhood resident)

Figure 4. *Embroidering Hope*

Source: Photographic archive of the author.



In Ciudad Bolívar, one is closer to resistance and the sky. (Neighborhood resident)

Figure 5. *Embroidering Resistances.*

Source: Author's photographic archive.



Figure 6. *Embroidering Balance Between the Natural and the Built.*

Source: Author's photographic archive.

Narrative: In the tranquility of nature, we find the peace that nourishes our lives and reminds us of the importance of preserving this sacred balance. (Neighborhood resident)



Figure 7. *Embroidering an Understanding of Reality.*

Source: Author's photographic archive.

Narrative: We don't realize how vast the world is until we start seeing it up close. (Neighborhood resident)



Figure 8. *Embroidering Beauty Behind Necessity.*

Source: Author's photographic archive.

Narrative: Behind the rubble, there are works of art from the community itself, where not even an architect could explain how they built their houses so strong and well-attached to the ground. (Neighborhood resident)



Figure 9. *Embroidering Peace Little by Little.*

Source: Author's photographic archive.

Narrative: Even the smallest stone can build a great wall; the smallest creations and steps greatly contribute to the construction of peace. (Neighborhood resident)



Figure 10. *Embroidering Dreams in Peace.*

Source: Author's photographic archive.

Narrative: It's not possible to build without allowing ourselves to dream, and this only comes from those who can become children again by believing in hope and finding in their dreams the beauty of achieving a better tomorrow: "Peace." (Neighborhood resident)

The photographs became a platform for dialogue between the actors involved (researchers and neighborhood residents), focusing on the aesthetics of common spaces and homes. Discussions revolved around gardens that evoke memories of their rural origins, reminiscent colors of the visual styles from their home territories, and balconies that symbolize values of coexistence rooted in social trust and a strong sense of community. In essence, the photographs provided an anthropological reading of the place. Later, the act of embroidering these photographs facilitated a conversation about the aspirations for public spaces and the challenges embedded in the territory. These issues were narrated and brought to light through formal and informal interviews and conversations shaped by the act of "walking."

Me gusta que haya colegios, iglesias, niños parques, tantas cosas para niños, que con cualquier cosa son felices, porque tengo tres nietos, y cada una de diferente hija y ellos le dicen a la mamá, iremos al restaurante tal, donde hay pelotas de no sé qué, y se conforman con ir y botarse allá y jugar [...] En el caso mío, lo digo por mí, yo necesitaría urgente, [...] me toca sacar a mi mami de la casa es un complicate, de allá me toca sacarla y caminar todo esto, y digamos por aquí no pasa la carretera. (Entrevista a Ligia, habitante del barrio El Recuerdo Sur, 2023)

"I like that there are schools, churches, parks for children —so many things for kids. They are happy with anything because I have three grandchildren, each from a different daughter, and they tell their moms, 'Let's go to such-and-such restaurant where they have those balls,' and they're happy just to go there, throw themselves around, and play. [...] For me personally, I urgently need [...] to take my mom out of the house, which is very complicated. I have to take her out and walk all this way because the road doesn't pass through here."

*(Interview with Ligia, resident of the El
Recuerdo Sur neighborhood, 2023)*

Cuando yo llegué yo sembré un jardín en este patio, donde hay un cuarto ya, ese era un patio, en ese cuarto yo tenía, me tocó disque sacar un aguacatico porque se nos dañó. Por aquí tengo a mi hijo, este muchacho ya tiene 22 años, porque tengo una con la pala, él me ayudaba mucho con la pala. (Entrevista a Marlem, habitante del barrio El Recuerdo Sur, 2023)

“When I arrived, I planted a garden in this patio, where there’s now a room. It used to be an open patio. In that room, I had to remove an avocado tree because it got damaged. My son is here; this young man is now 22. Back then, I had a little one with a shovel—he used to help me a lot with the digging.”

*(Interview with Marlem, resident of the El
Recuerdo Sur neighborhood, 2023)*

Cuando yo llegué acá no había luz, no había agua, no había casas. En la entrada no había ni carretera, esta misma la organizamos nosotros los sábados, domingos y festivos, y ya una máquina nos ayudó. Se contaban las casas, había ranchitos como ven hoy en día, se contaban, no teníamos vías de acceso. (Entrevista a Carmen, habitante del barrio El Recuerdo Sur, 2023)

“When I arrived here, there was no electricity, no water, no houses. There wasn’t even a road at the entrance. We organized the road ourselves on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, and eventually, a machine came to help. We could count the houses; there were just small huts, as you still see today, with no access roads.”

*(Interview with Carmen, resident of the El
Recuerdo Sur neighborhood, 2023)*

Embroidery —weaving— serves as both a metaphor and a narrative act. Both embroidery and ethnography are ways of writing and interpreting lived experiences in the territory. They reveal shared emotions and impacts. The practice of embroidery exposes the connection between weaving and self-recognition; it is, by nature, a public expression offered to others and brought to life on fabric (Pérez-Bustos & Chocontá, 2018).

Painting to Dream and Reclaim Public Space

Painting public spaces is more than an aesthetic act; it is a form of reivindication and reclamation. Interventions using paint —whether on streets, urban furniture, or graffiti— become tools to appropriate spaces, filling them with visual languages that express the voice of the territory. As Chacón-Cervera and Cuesta-Moreno (2013) explain, these acts often serve as denunciations, conveying political messages through creative imagination, blending memory, ingenuity, and both individual and collective subjectivity.

In Las Cruces neighborhood, painting emerges as a key form of expression, visible through graffiti —unauthorized pictorial or textual representations— and murals, which are created with prior permission. Both reflect daily realities and social struggles, while also voicing dreams, protests, and challenges to inequality. These visual elements are often intertwined with rhythmic poetry set to music, complemented by breakdance performances at the same locations where graffiti emerges.

Since the 1990s, Las Cruces has gained recognition for its internationally acclaimed hip-hop groups, which have provided cultural alternatives for local youth. The neighborhood has earned citywide recognition through festivals held in public spaces, with parks playing a fundamental role in fostering these cultural activities (Canal Capital, 2017; En Órbita, 2014; Productions Just Him, 2016). Engaging with a territory through its aesthetics and imagery reveals its aspirations, grievances, and visions for urban life. In this context, a participatory intervention with residents and youth groups from Las Cruces created opportunities to discuss perceptions of place, the significance of appropriated spaces, and the use of color as a resonant voice in the territory. This intervention also included a forward-looking approach, addressing not only those who live in the neighborhood today but also those who will inherit its historical memory. The intervention unfolded through three main actions: exploring narratives of place, analyzing visual languages (colors, forms, and messages), and conducting participatory urban actions. Fifteen young people from a music collective, who express themselves through hip-hop genres like rap and trap as well as through murals and graffiti, participated in this process. Their work included painting the pathway leading to a park, inviting passersby to enter and signaling to residents that the park is a space for collective encounters and dialogue. The strategic use of color became a key element in this urban

intervention. The project began by recognizing preexisting artistic expressions in the park, including an anonymous mural. Despite its age, this mural served as a discursive tool, reflecting the neighborhood's memory, collective milestones, and urban imaginaries. The colors from the mural were reinterpreted and applied to the park's paving stones, creating temporary, experimental urban actions. These actions informed a larger intervention, expanding the chosen color palette to the park's structures, such as playground equipment and urban furniture, transforming the space into a vibrant and inclusive environment.

Painting the Park and Perceptions of the Territory



Figure 11. *Painting the Essence of Being*

Source: Author's photographic archive.

Narrative: Color transforms us; it's an invitation to talk about the day, the landscape, and what happens to you in each space. It's not just placed there; it's telling us that what we inhabit carries something of our essence. (Neighborhood resident)



Figure 12. *Painting and Leaving a Mark*

Source: Author's photographic archive.

Narrative: There (on the wall) are the marks left by those who have worked to find a voice, where public space is sometimes the only place to shout with colors. (Neighborhood resident)



Figure 13. *Painting for Everyone*

Source: Author's photographic archive

Narrative: We paint to imagine a better place, where there's room for everyone, where life brings us together. (Neighborhood resident)

The previous participatory urban action not only reflects an effort to aestheticize public space but also represents a political practice that underpins social demands for collective well-being. In this sense, it is possible to state that a relationship between public space and democracy is at play. According to Páramo and Burbano (2014), this relationship arises from a foundational interest in various dimensions that intertwine space with democratic processes, as public spaces embrace a diversity of expressions and social demands, both individual and collective, in symbolic and social forms.

When public space is intervened through artistic actions, it creates opportunities for people to meet and facilitates the production and projection of images that represent the social practices underlying the territories. In this regard, the exercise presented in this section makes visible, in concrete terms, the ways in which social actors become involved in the construction of desired representations of the city. Additionally, it captures what occurs within these desires through imagery.

Approaching territories through participatory and ethnographic methodologies reveals processes of appropriation, identity, and the projection of lived spaces. At the same time, these approaches embody a pedagogical-didactic practice in which the image plays a key role in shaping the territories, both as a trace and as a desire. These two forms of practice express the city both as an object and, simultaneously, as the protagonist of urban intervention processes.

Conclusions

Working with vulnerable communities across various disciplines, and contributing to the transformation of their territories, requires academic reflections that integrate didactic and pedagogical strategies aligned with the realities of the context. In this process, both the objective and subjective perceptions identified within the urban environment are crucial. It is essential to extract experiences that weave together the development of artistic and cultural expressions, connecting them with the desires, needs, and everyday practices within the communities.

Photography and painting emerge as alternatives for recognizing objects within the territory. These practices act as mediators between imagination and reality, giving new meanings to the urban landscape, while also encouraging

individual reflection on one's integration into the community, as well as collective reflections that strengthen understanding of the roles to be played in consolidating struggles and projecting new ones for the betterment of the physical and social environment.

The pedagogical work carried out in the El Recuerdo Sur neighborhood recognized walking and pausing for contemplation as an enriching process for aesthetic and ethnographic analysis. This process allowed for the collection of sensations, the diagnosis of situations, and the recognition of behaviors that usually go unnoticed in everyday life. In Las Cruces, this work, using strategies that enabled observation, narration, and imagination, led to actions focused on staying, gathering, appropriating, and transforming the territory.

The involvement of researchers and external collaborators ensures the collection of data —images and narratives— and their processing through techniques like fabric printing, collage creation, and the identification of colors, objects, and surfaces to be intervened. These processes resulted in concrete proposals. In El Recuerdo Sur, for example, this work led to the design of a park in a protected area, shielding it from the predatory activities of individuals selling illegally acquired land. In Las Cruces, the effort attracted new population groups to a space that was losing its original purpose and suffering from rapid physical and functional deterioration. This transformation created a space that now serves as a place of collective memory —a landmark within the community— while addressing the needs for recreation, leisure, and the strengthening of community ties.

References

- Acuerdo 20 de 1890. <https://www.alcaldiabogota.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=9731>
- Buraglia, P. (1998). Urban aesthetics and citizen participation. *Bitácora Urbano Territorial*, 2(1), 42-47. <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/bitacora/article/view/18840>
- Canal Capital. (February 15, 2017). Rap Capital Yako. [Facebook]. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1212684798826697>
- Careri, F. (2017). *WALKSCAPES. Walking as an aesthetic practice*. Gustavo Gilli.
- Cepeda, E. (2020). *Walking to Re-signify: Collective actions for the transformation of territorial reality*. [Master's thesis,



- Universidad Pedagógica Nacional]. Repositorio de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. http://upnblib.pedagogica.edu.co/bitstream/handle/20.500.12209/11953/Caminar_para_resignificar_acciones_colectivas_para_la_transformacion_de_la_realidad_territorial.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Chacón-Cervera, J., & Cuesta-Moreno, O. (2013). Graffiti as an artistic expression that constructs the political: Plurality of worlds and perceptions. A look at Bogotá. *Revista Nodo*, 14 (7), 65-76.
- Delgado, A., Robledo, E., & Márquez, H. (2016). Didactics of the image: From support material to language for pedagogical mediation in learning environments with technologies. *Revista Internacional de Tecnologías en la Educación*, 3(2). <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6877953>
- Del Rio, V. (2022). *The trace in the representation of territory through Spanish photography from 2004 to 2016*. Universidad de Salamanca. <http://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcg-clefindmkaj/https://core.ac.uk/download/541076827.pdf>
- En Órbita. (August 13, 2014). Rap from Las Cruces to the world. [YouTube]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAtw-_nh_1g
- Ganz, N. (2006). *Graffiti Mujer*. Gustavo Gilli.
- Gurbindo Gil, R. (2019). Contemplating the Navarre ethnography. *Cuadernos de Etnología y Etnografía de Navarra (CEEN)*, (93), 363-395.
- Guzmán, A. (2016). Urban imaginaries and their use as an analysis tool for landscape elements. *Legado De Arquitectura Y Diseño*, 11(20), 47-60. <https://legado-dearquitecturaydiseno.uaemex.mx/article/view/4760>
- Hernández, J. (2007). Aesthetics and popular habitat. *AISTHESIS*, (41), 11-35. <file:///C:/Users/alacruz/Downloads/Dialnet-EsteticaYHabitatPopular-2722197.pdf>
- Jaramillo, D. (2013). *The imagined city: Territories, the imaginary, and the symbolic*. *Estoa*, (2), 27-37. https://dspace.ucaenca.edu.ec/bitstream/123456789/27661/1/Estoa2_4.pdf
- Llorente, E. (2000). Images in teaching. *Revista de Psicodidáctica*, (9), 0.
- Mandoki, K. (1994). *Prosaica: Introduction to the aesthetics of the everyday*. Grijalbo.
- Munari, B. (2000). *Design and visual communication*. Gustavo Gilli.
- Noe, G., & Segura, R. (2022). Urban ethnography and the urban in ethnography. *Etnografías Contemporáneas*, 2(3), 12-24. <https://revistasacademicas.unsam.edu.ar/index.php/etnocontemp/article/view/415/385>
- Páramo, P., & Burbano, A. (2014). The uses and appropriation of public space for the strengthening of democracy. *Revista de Arquitectura*, 16, 6-15.
- Pérez-Bustos, T., & Chocontá, A. (2018). Sewing an ethnography: How collective sewing affects ethnographic intimacy. *Debate Feminista*, (56), 1-25. <https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/dfem/v56/2594-066X-dfem-56-1.pdf>
- Productions Just Him. (August 24, 2016). Hip Hop Las Cruces documentary "From the cradle to Hip Hop." [YouTube]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IIU50IL4M4>
- Rodríguez-Plaza, P. (2000). Aesthetic experience and identity in Latin America. *Aisthesis*, (33), 35-59.
- Rigo, D. Y. (2014). Learning and teaching through images. Educational challenge. *ASRI - Art and Society. Research journal*, 6. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/4665727.pdf>
- Rojas, J. (2017). Photography as a didactic strategy for environmental teaching-learning with ninth-grade students from Cambridge School in Pamplona. A pedagogical experience. *CIE*, 1(3), 24-37.
- Yi-Fu Tuan. (2007). *Topophilia: A study of perceptions, attitudes, and values about the environment*. Editorial Melusina.