

FACTORS OF INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION OF URBAN FACILITIES IN THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN PERIPHERIES OF GRANADA

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ABSTRACT

The study of urban facilities of the northern and southern districts of the city of Granada is proposed, which are observed from their spatial conditions of localization. The point would be to assess the way in which these conditions influence the ability of each urban facility to generate social cohesion in urban surroundings. Urban facilities have a social function as collective urban nodes, becoming meeting places and linking of the collective sphere. Currently, the social and spatial fragmentation of cities is increasingly higher, which deepens the social breaking up of public spaces. Thus, it is necessary to strengthen social cohesion using available public resources: public spaces and the set of urban facilities. A proper location of public buildings in the urban fabric -in terms of accessibility, proximity to residential areas, etc.- promotes social interaction and the strengthening of the social capital of the neighbourhoods. The research proposed a study on two levels, morphological and social. Each of them requires a triple methodology related to each other: cartographic, on a qualitative level, and on a quantitative one. The preliminary results of research are presented here. A comparable set of multifunctional urban facilities (civic centres, sports centres, and health centres) is addressed. The social dynamics of the surroundings of each one is analysed, trying to draw conclusions about the better or worse suitability of diverse solutions. Results allow us to conclude with a series of patterns and criteria of location and urban design of facilities in the city. Promoting the economic and social activation of urban areas and strengthening the social fabric are other research objectives. In addition, the aim would be to improve the conditions of urban location and design and relative to the public spaces attached.

KEYWORDS _ *urban facilities, public space, urban planning, social cohesion, urban design, periphery, Granada*

INTRODUCTION

Urban facilities, regardless of their specific function, have a social function as collective urban nodes, as meeting places and linking of the collective sphere (Ledrut, 1976). Nowadays cities are increasingly prone to social and spatial fragmentation, aggravated by conditions arising from emergencies such as the health crisis and the economic crisis. It is necessary to strengthen social cohesion using public resources from those that are arranged, which at a spatial level are public space and urban facilities. Such socioeconomic and spatial changes push us to sustain a more leisurely, reflective, and valuing look at cities. It is time perhaps for an urban planning that Solà-Morales & Parcerisa (1987: 38) called for, which recomposes the city and its urban fabrics "between topography and layout (...) as a project for the promotion and configuration of public and collective spaces". From previous studies carried out, it has been observed and verified in nearby urban contexts, that a correct position of public urban functions favors social interaction and the strengthening of the social capital of the neighborhoods. It is also valid for their architectures and the design of their own spaces related to urban fabric, in terms of accessibility, proximity to residential areas, urban accesses quality, etc.

Research focused on urban facilities is proposed from the view of their spatial conditions of urban location and of urban design of public space around them. The aim is to assess how these conditions can influence to generate social cohesion in urban environments, mainly in peripheral neighborhoods. Specifically, the study is developed regarding sports equipment, health, and social services, as these types usually attract a very diverse population range and mean an increasingly more demand by citizens.

DIMENSIONAL BASES OF URBAN FACILITIES TO PROMOTE GREATER SOCIAL COHESION

The research carried out proposes to respond to one of the greatest social emergencies within the urban context, that is, urban cohesion and the identification of shared identities. The mechanism on which we rely is the urban exploitation of public or shared resources.

The current logic of the production of urban space frequently results in spatial segregation. Many principles are the basis for such segregation: the isolation of the area or neighborhood due to the lack of public transport connection; the deficit in urbanization; from the absence of basic services to a chronic shortage of equipment and public space; the reduction of urban functions in the neighborhood (Pinto and Remesar, 2012).

To counteract the above, urban science and technique also need to be linked to the knowledge generated about the social dynamics of appropriation, filling the urban space with meaning with the practice of citizenship (De Certeau, 2000; Harvey, 2008). In this sense, it would be crucial understanding the true transformative dimension of public space, which is an inducer of collective spaces in the city. In the words of Solà-Morales (1992), "all the places where collective life takes place, is represented and remembered".

Shared use of public spaces can also create a degree of mutual recognition and feelings of comfort based on public familiarity: recognizing others and being recognized in local spaces. (Blokland and Nast 2014). Informal encounters favor class and ethnic encounters, while formal encounters maintain stereotypes and class idea (Ahmadi, 2017). According to "the contact hypothesis" (Allport 1979), under the right circumstances, interpersonal contact between majority and minority groups has the potential to reduce prejudice. This is especially relevant when working to improve social cohesion in vulnerable peripheries such as the areas studied in the research.

In many definitions of social sustainability, the physical environment leads to social coexistence and promoting the well-being of diverse groups (Ali, Al-Betawi and Al-Qudah, 2019). On one hand, Jabareen (2006) associates social sustainability outcomes with seven design concepts or typologies, including compactness, sustainable transportation, density, mixed land uses, diversity, passive solar design,

and greening. Leyden (2003), on the other hand, highlights the role of urban form design in improving social ties among residents.

It is widely found that the accessibility and usefulness of the facilities improve with their networked operation, although they require the study of the local spatiality of their environment (Taleai & al., 2014). It is considered of great relevance the assessment of the conditions of the facilities both in their insertion in the urban fabric, the design conditions of the urban environment and the socialization and actual use of them.

In accordance with these dimensional bases of urban facilities and their contribution to social cohesion, the methodological approach presented in the following section is developed. It is intended to study the conditions of their implantation, their urban synergies and the existence and design of the surrounding public spaces.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES

The case studies are selected among urban facilities located in the peripheral area of the city of Granada, in two areas with a high vulnerability index: on one hand, the Zaidín neighborhood, located in the southern district; on the other hand, the Cartuja neighborhood, which is in the northern district of Granada. The two peripheral areas were improved their urban fabric with the urban planning and development of new urban facilities due to the master plans of the late s. XX. However, urban dynamics in recent decades have led to the fragmentation and dissolution of traditional neighborhood community ties. Among them we can mention the expulsion of population towards metropolitan periphery, due to housing prices; the arrival of migrant population and changes in the social structure; or the polarization of the work-residence relationship. Therefore, it is essential to establish contemporary urban mechanisms that help strengthen the social urban fabric. To this end, the urban facilities selected should constitute a key variable on which daily life and the possibilities of meeting and building community networks are based. Urban facilities have been chosen for analysis having enough development and time from its foundation. Thus, the urban facilities have established, in a better or worse way, a level of relationship with the urban environment to have generated the positive or negative effects and appropriation dynamics that could now be recognized and assessed (Martínez, 2014; Peimbert, 2019).

The methodological approach designed combine the morphological study of the urban structure of the urban facilities -the local scope of the facility and its collective functions-, with the study of the sociological variable. Regarding the last one, the forms of use and appropriation of space public linked to the urban facility is analyzed. This approach allows an assessment of the facilities based on their capacity to build the collective and revitalize urban environments. A more friendly and linked urban environment around the urban facility is partially the consequence of various characteristics of their design and their implementation in the neighborhood fabric.



Figure 1: General views of the accesses to the selected urban facilities in the north of Granada (From left to right: Sports center, Civic center, and Health center). Source: Authors.

Research is proposed in 2 levels, MORPHOLOGICAL and SOCIAL, both considering a triple methodological approach related to each other: CARTOGRAPHIC, QUALITATIVE and QUANTITATIVE. A multidisciplinary research team was set up, so that each of the research dimensions was formulated and developed from expert knowledge. Furthermore, the research itinerary had to intrinsically contain the verification of contextual knowledge, produced through urban analysis and field work, participant observation and interviews. Three work areas are organized: B1. CARTOGRAPHIC – B2. SOCIOLOGICAL – B3. DYNAMIC (Fig. 2). This methodological system allows a better disciplinary development of each area and a better management of researchers involved in each set of tasks.

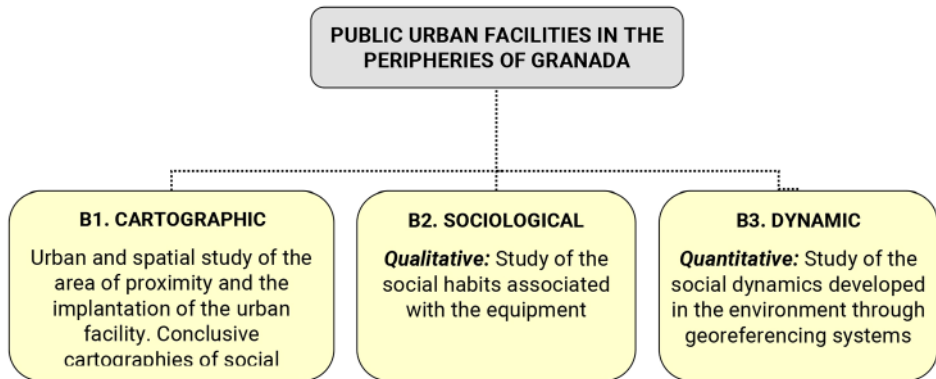


Figure 2: Multidisciplinary work areas for the development of research. Source: Authors

The main objective of research is to find out how spatial characteristics of urban facilities -free spaces of the facility, the relationship between indoor and outdoor, public spaces around the facility, among others-, influence their greater or lesser capacity to generate complementary and casual activities in their urban environment of influence. Thereby, it is revealed the design criteria that allow us to take advantage of urban facilities potential as nodes of urban activity and in the configuration of the social urban fabric.

RESULTS

Firstly, the health service facilities (Health Centers), social services (Civic Centers) and multi-sports centers have been selected to be studied, one of each type in each district. The aim would be to have a comparative vision but diverse. After the analysis of urban facility types, the target population of each facility and the intensity of use in a daily routine of the neighborhood are also addressed.

A characterization of each urban facility environment has been developed. In this sense, its influence on sociability in the public space and the synergies with retail and other facilities located in the nearest surroundings have been observed. The concept of space attached to the urban facility (Bravo & Rivas, 2021; Low & Altman, 1992) has been used to identify the area of influence of urban facility. The consideration of the "space attached" has been combined with the measure of 5-minutes walking distance, affected by the conditions of the urban fabric. This is the way to deduce an "accessibility contour" to the urban facility. Both information layers are contrasted with direct observation that has allowed to understand the forms of use of space by the population. A differentiation between mandatory, optional, and resulting social activities (Gehl, 2011) has been applied.

The methodology implies a development according to the following work areas:

1. Cartographic study

An accurate cartography of the current features of the public space related to each urban facility has been prepared (Figure 3). The urban analysis has meant dealing with the following tasks: the arrangement of urban furniture, the existing vegetation in the open space, night lighting, pedestrian crossing, housing typology and access, bus stops, level of urbanization, etc. Besides, retail and service sector located in ground-floor differentiated according to commercial profiles, in the sphere of influence of each urban facility, have been identified. The urban and architectural design of the limits of each urban facility are relevant to analyze the relationship existing throughout its perimeter. This is why the different types of current walls, fences, or plant filters in the boundaries of public lot for the urban facility have been pointed out.

The conditions of public space around the facility have been assessed: (1) setting a wide range of indicators to measure them; (2) analyzing normative sources and related research, in relation to the strategy for urban location; and (3) interpreting the influence of the adjacent urban fabrics and the design of the proximity public space of each urban facility. All this considering its capacity to consolidate itself as social infrastructure. In the final phase, a multi-criteria evaluation is going to be carried out according to the following groups of indicators:

- **Urban mobility:** pedestrian traffic, distance to public transport stops, car parks and ease of pedestrian route to and from them.
- **Accessibility:** architectural barriers, visibility of accesses, etc.
- **Urban comfort:** livability, materials, benches and other urban furniture, lighting, safety, vegetation, relationship with other uses, width of sidewalks, existence of playgrounds, etc.
- **Implementation in the urban fabric:** relationship with residential urban fabric, relationship with public spaces, connectivity with the main urban network, distance to other facilities, etc.
- **Social cohesion:** population analysis, social relations, cultural activities, population scope of urban facilities, etc.

2. Socio-demographic study

The socio-demographic study of social habits associated with urban facilities has been developed through three methodological components:

- a) **Socio-demographic profile of users** of each of the urban facilities chosen.
- b) **Stratified survey** (age and sex), which collects the most relevant information on frequency of use, reasons, and motivations for the use of the facilities, way of access and the most favorable and unfavorable aspects of the services (Martos et al., 2014).
- c) **In-depth interviews with professionals and discussion groups among users** to ascertain the existence and intensity of the “social construction” of social habits beyond those that are purely functional. The interviews and meetings have been performed considering the specific characteristics of the urban space observed and the possible emergence of “finite domains of meaning” (Schütz, 1970).

The information obtained has been spatially interpreted and transferred to a representative cartography of diverse forms of appropriation of the local environment of each urban facility.

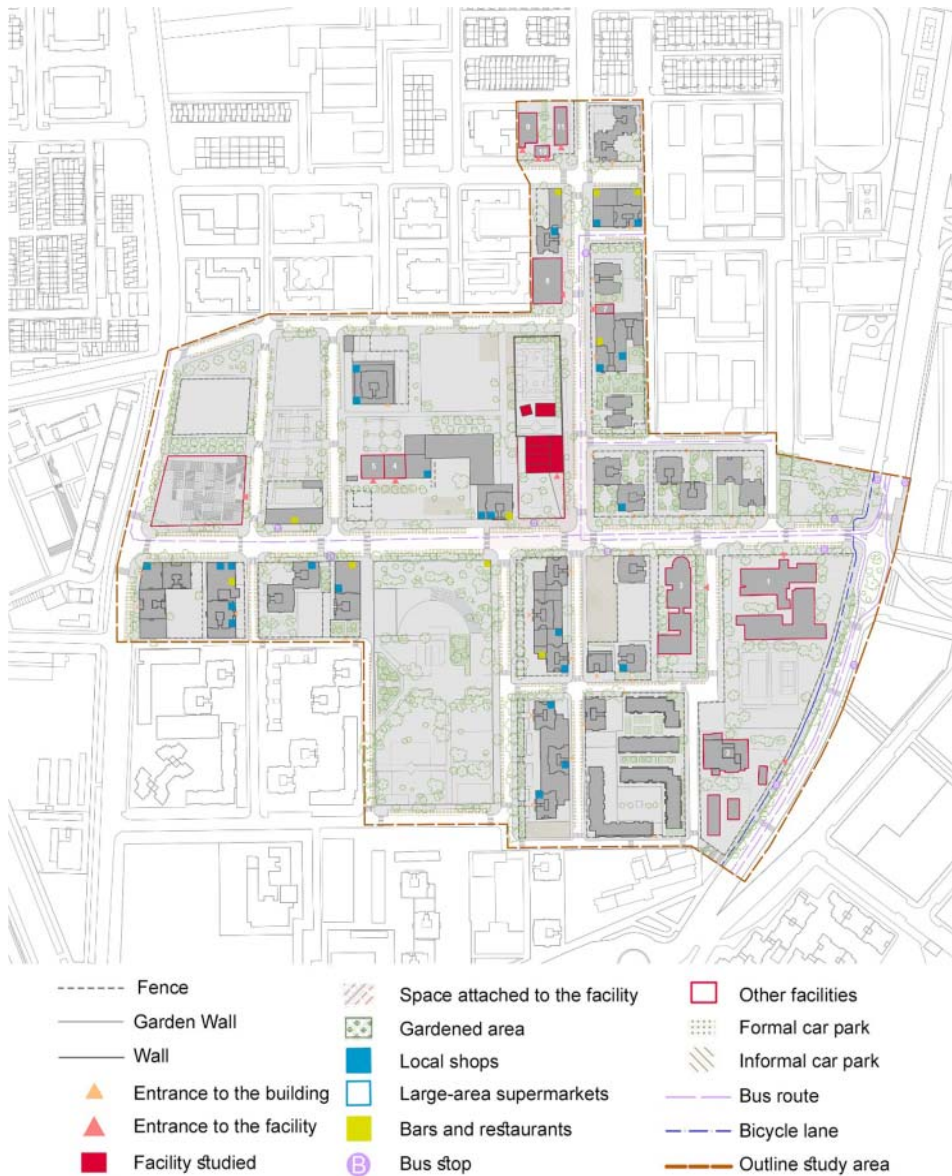


Figure 3: Area of influence of the Civic Center of the Northern District of Granada. Source: Authors

3. Study of urban dynamics

On one hand, descriptive data of the population profile and residential buildings have been analyzed, and they have been related to the urban location of each urban facility through the isochrones. These isochrones have been drawn describing the distance to the urban facility based on the time spent walking taking the facility as a starting point (Molero, 2020). On the other hand, the social dynamics developed in the local environment are studied through georeferencing systems. Such systems have used data mining from GIS and scraping techniques on different sources of mobile information such

as social networks, browsers, games, or applications associated with public transport. All the data have been collected and scanned at appropriate intervals at different times of the day and week. The point would be to obtain information on the variability of use of public space and facilities, and with it their influence on the local urban environment.



Figure 4: Mapping the 5-minutes isochron, the 10 and the 15 ones referenced to the Zaidín Sur Health Center in relation to the population density (center) and the heights of the building (right). Source: Authors

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the research focus, it has been revealed that the local environment of influence of the urban facility is largely consistent with a 5-minute walk distance. In this area, there are retail in the ground-floor and labor activities that generate synergies with the type of service offered by the public urban facility. In addition of this, the public space attached to the urban facility acts as a space for sociability, mainly if it participates in the pedestrian flows of entrances, waiting, or visibility of the own activity. This is why the remarkable public space in relation to the building must have conditions in terms of urban design: urban comfort conditions, spatiality, physical and visual connection with the interior of the urban facility, among others. The comparative vision between neighborhoods and between urban facilities case studies has allowed us to deduce several conclusions. Firstly, the urban facilities located in central positions of the neighboring urban fabric develop their social function under better conditions, integrating into the daily dynamics of local population in a better way.

Secondly, through analyzing the urban facilities in vulnerable areas in peripheral districts of Granada city it is shown that social factors (the feeling of security, isolation, or mistrust, among others) are very relevant when it comes to establishing neighborhood networks. Thus, strengthening urban networks is a fundamental base to facilitate the use of the urban facility. Moreover, configuring its local environment as a safe space is a key factor, even more to help to socialization in these areas and to generate bonds of trust.

Thirdly, a multidisciplinary methodology produces more accurate results when it comes to understanding the urban behavior of the facilities studied. In addition of that, the results are more adjusted to the reality of the social use of space.

Finally, interesting conclusions have been reached from the methodological point of view, on the ways of interacting between specific procedures of sociology and architecture and criteria related to urban location. For this, it is crucial the ability to understand and map urban space involved, figuring out the urban relations from and to each urban facility, which can be extrapolated to further research and other contexts.

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