The urban experience as seen from the park: Spatial practice in neighbourhood parks of Bogotá, Colombia

by

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Dedication

To God… for everything

To the park users of Villa and Niza for sharing their love for their park, their community and their city with me.

To my mother Oliva, my sisters Andrea and Paola, my uncle and aunty Alvaro and Teresa for their unconditional love and support at home and in the distance. And to my father Saul who is always with me and guides my steps.

To Mulham for joining me in this part of the journey of our lives.
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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for any degree at this or other institution.

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Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte
**Introductory story**

My interest in cities began from living in a special one. When I was a child, during the 1980s, I remember that my sisters and I were the only *Bogotanas* I knew. Everybody lived there, but no one was from there. For example, my parents and relatives came from other regions in the country. No one was born in Bogotá, and no one wanted to be from there. As I remember the Bogotá of my childhood, I could understand why nobody liked it. There was rubbish everywhere, public transport was unpleasant, driving was a nightmare, people always seemed to be in a bad mood, and the city was always cold, cloudy and dark. People used to spend their free time indoors.

When I was still a teenager, in 1996, I enrolled to study Architecture in *Los Andes* University in Bogotá. I loved the place from the beginning. The campus had renovated colonial buildings combined with award-winning contemporary buildings and great natural surroundings. Socially, the university was like the ‘Mount Olympus’, only the chosen (generally wealthy people) fitted in straightaway. I came from a public school, and I was living in a middle class neighbourhood so I fitted in the group of the *non-Bogotanos*, or students coming from other regions of the country. They were not as arrogant as the *Bogotanos* despite the fact that they were wealthy as well.

In the years I spent at university, I lived the urban experience at its best. Previously, when I was at school, I couldn’t go out alone and curfew was quite early for me. I had a school bus so I didn’t know how to deal with public transport. I didn’t know any other part of the city apart from a couple of neighbourhoods, and the downtown. University was my ticket to experiencing the city on my own. I also got my citizenship card at the age of 18, so I could vote, and I could access places that had been out of reach when I was underage.

I started experiencing and loving a somewhat bohemian lifestyle. Artsy movies in MAMBO (the museum of contemporary arts), flea markets, Cuban salsa dancing, listening to ‘protest music’, drinking a couple of beers in the corner shop nearby university on Friday nights, were part of my routine.
Meanwhile my academic life was rather intense, 5 or 6 subjects per semester plus English classes at the American institute absorbed most of my time. At university I started learning everything I could about Bogotá. All I didn’t know and all I already experienced but in an academic perspective were the subjects of the classes I undertook. Most of my thoughts were about the city and the urban experience. I was fascinated with it. At the same time that my urban experience blossomed, the city blossomed as well. It slowly became an enjoyable dynamic place to live in, even to my regionalised group of friends. People stopped dumping rubbish everywhere, there were more and better parks, security improved to some extent and there were more things to do for people with a lot or with little money. However, transport was still crazy, it has only improved in recent years. I lived this transformation as a citizen by enjoying myself, and as a student by analysing the changes and participating in debate about the city.

As a girl form a working class family, I experienced some difficult times but I knew it was much tougher for many other people so I considered myself lucky. I didn’t know how the rich lived but at university I could see it. My understanding was that there was a huge gap between wealthy and poor people to the extreme that they did not know much about each other’s lifestyles and opportunities.

University gave me the opportunity to experience different urban lifestyles, and the knowledge and structure of thinking that made this thesis possible. Bogotá gave me fascination, passion, wonder, frustration and hope. To see the city’s transformation from nobody’s place to a nice place to live in makes me feel fortunate of my origin and my time living there. I hope this thesis communicates effectively most of the thoughts that have been in my head for a number of years.
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Abstract

Latin American research has addressed the role of urban landscapes in contributing to a sense of community, to social relationships, to the quality of urban life and to community development (Davis, 1994; Myers, 1997). However, apart from Low’s (2000) ethnography of urban plazas in San Jose, Costa Rica, there has been little systematic research on urban public space in Latin America, and even less on parks.

This thesis analyses, compares and evaluates spatial practice in two local parks of Bogotá, Colombia. Spatial practice in this research is defined according to Lefebvre’s (1974) writing on the production of space. Spatial practice refers to the sensorial level of spatial phenomena; it involves uses, interactions, perceptions, influences and transformations in the everyday relationships between space and people.

The two parks under investigation are located in and belong to different socio-economic areas and the cross-class comparison of parks and spatial practice is important in a highly segregated city such as Bogotá. Locally, the two parks are part of the innovative municipal government program, ‘Parks for Learning How to Live,’ (1998-2000). This project transformed public space physically as well as residents’ perceptions of public space, parks, and outdoor recreation and leisure. The research design was qualitative because it sought information on perceptions, uses and feelings of park users. This research addresses three questions:

- How do the reciprocal interactions between parks and communities shape spatial practice and urban public life in two neighbourhood parks in Bogotá?
- How does socio-economic status impact upon spatial practice and urban public life in these two neighbourhood parks?
- Has the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ adequately responded to spatial practice in local parks by addressing and fulfilling park users’ needs?

Methodologically, this research used an adaptation of Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures, (REAP), by combining document analysis, casual and systematic observation of parks, cognitive mapping, street interviews and in-depth
interviews. The combination of these research methods allowed for the collection of data by which to analyse specific research objectives under different perspectives for triangulation purposes. The fieldwork was divided into two phases, the first during July and August 2002 and the second during January and February 2004. Document analysis was continuously engaged in before and after the fieldwork phases.

The interpretation of the data focused on five dimensions that explain the perceptions, feelings, and practices of park users. The perceptions of children, youth, adults and elders were analysed separately. The themes of analysis included: interactions between people; interactions between users and the physical space of the park; uses of and activities in the parks; administrative and socio-political issues; and identity and sense of belonging. These themes were analysed in the same way in both parks and then cross examined for comparisons. The findings identified that despite the two parks being similar in terms of their physical characteristics, they display different spatial practices that in turn reflect the socio-economic status, history, and expectations of the communities that use them.

The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ was important to the improvement of urban public space, empowerment of local communities and transformation of the negative image people had about living in and visiting Bogotá. However, at the local level, the municipal project did not take into account the ways each community develops their spatial practice in parks and for that reason provided only partial improvement to the social relationships and uses of parks. Park users seem satisfied with the latest advances in public space, however, there are a number of specific characteristics in these communities that affect their perceptions and the ways they use parks. This research provides an in-depth analysis of the spatial practice in these two parks in order to start building a bottom-up framework that may be instrumental for future planning.
International Theatre Festival of Bogotá. Street performance in the main plaza

Chapter 1: Local parks in Bogotá, an urban experience
1.1 Introduction

Latin American cities have often been regarded as out of control and chaotic, with a low quality of life. Problems such as crime and poverty, violence and degradation of environments are common characteristics, well documented in research (A. Gilbert, 1996; Greenfield, 1994; Hardoy, 1992; Hauser, 1961; Valladares & Coelho, 1995; Viviescas, 2001). Latin American cities have the ongoing challenge to respond to and overcome these negative conditions. Recently, municipal governments in many parts of Latin America have identified that the appropriate and adequate provision of public space contributes to improving urban structure, urban environments, urban lifestyles and urban quality of life.

The role of urban public space in Latin American cities has then, recently acquired more importance in the areas of urban planning, management, urban studies and social sciences. The research for this thesis has identified three main reasons for this recent interest in public space. The first reason is that Latin American cities have large populations and high densities; therefore, public space and public transport become crucial elements of their infrastructure. The second reason is that the large majority of the urban populations of Latin American cities are poor; consequently, urban populations count on public services to satisfy their needs. The third reason is that urban public space has been identified as the physical element of the urban structure in which social and spatial dimensions of urban life intersect. Elements such as a sense of community, cultural values, environmental attitudes, social interactions, recreation and leisure, lifestyles, among others, are elements that are reflected in the urban public space.

Research on public space in Latin American cities has been increasing. A number of studies on public space in the social sciences have been conducted (Abate, 1992;
Altman & Taylor, 1973; Altman & Zube, 1989; Corcoran, 2002; Coyula, 1996; Hummon, 1990; Setha M Low, 1996; Setha M. Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Scarpaci, 2003). These studies have often addressed issues of place attachment, social relationships and the influence of public space on these relationships. Specifically in Bogotá, urban planning studies have addressed issues related to quality of life, the roles of parks and potential of parks (Armus & Lear, 1998; Buraglia, 1998; Jaramillo, 2003; Mejia Pavony & Zambrano, 2000; Mohan, 1994; Skinner, 2004; Richard E. Stren & McCarney, 1992).

The impacts of recent public space initiatives on residents in Bogotá are also beginning to be a theme of interest in urban research (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota, 2000; Araujo, 2002; Departamento Administrativo de Medio Ambiente, 2001; Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005; El Tiempo, 2002; Hurtado, Pardo, & Bedolla, 2003; Instituto Distrital de Recreacion y Deporte, 1992). Other studies have focused on the historical perspective of public space and how public space has shaped Latin American cities physically and socially (Arango, 1989; Buraglia, 1998; Davis, 1994; Durand & Pelaez, 1969; A. Gilbert, 1996; J. M. Gilbert & Szuchman, 1996; Hauser, 1961; Montezuma, 2000; Samper, 1969; Valladares & Coelho, 1995; Viviescas, 2001; Zambrano, 1990). These groups of studies have emphasised the importance of research to understand urban dynamics and therefore improve conditions in Bogotá.

The research presented in this thesis is a qualitative exploration of the socio-spatial relationships occurring in neighbourhood parks of Bogotá. The research uses the concept of spatial practice developed by Lefebvre (1974) to describe and analyse socio-spatial relationships. Spatial practice is examined in two local parks of Bogotá that constitute the cases studies for this research. Metropolitan issues such as socio-economic segregation and the impacts on public space of the latest initiatives in urban management are part of this research and are examined from the local perspective of neighbourhood parks.
1.2 Aims, scope, and delimitations of the research

This research is a qualitative, exploratory study of two local parks in Bogotá, Colombia. The analysis from this research develops at three levels. The first level examines how spatial practice occurs in neighbourhood parks of Bogotá; two local parks of the city that belong to areas with different socio-economic status were selected for the research. The second level analyses the similarities and differences of the spatial practice identified in each park, taking into account the assumption that socio-economic status influences spatial practice in different ways. The third level examines the impacts at the local level of the municipal government initiative ‘Parques para aprender a vivir’ or ‘Parks for learning how to live’ developed from 1998 to 2000. The three research questions that guide this research correspond to these three levels of analysis. The questions are:

- How do the reciprocal interactions between parks and communities shape spatial practice and urban public life in two neighbourhood parks in Bogotá?

- How does socio-economic status impact upon spatial practice and urban public life in these two neighbourhood parks?

- Has the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ adequately responded to spatial practice in local parks by addressing and fulfilling park users’ needs?

The aim of the research is to understand how spatial practice occurs in local parks and to examine the impacts and implications of spatial practice in local parks across different socio-economic status. Spatial practice involves socio-spatial relationships, in other words, how the elements that constitute public space interact. These elements include social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental forces that play different roles in the interactions between people in, and with public space. Additionally, the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project represents one starting point
for the transformation of public space in Bogotá. Therefore, this research also aims to analyse the implications of this project at the local level and the involvement of local communities in this project. This research explores forms of understanding urban lifestyles and experiences in the city from the public space, from local communities and the perspectives of residents of Bogotá. Furthermore, these local perspectives or bottom-up understandings of parks are contrasted to the top-down perspectives, which include the points of view of planners and urban management of Bogotá.

The scope of this research is the local level of neighbourhood parks in Bogotá. The parks examined are two neighbourhood parks of Bogotá that primarily serve to two local communities. The spatial practice of each park is explored individually by taking into account park users, their interactions in the park and their perceptions about the park. Subsequently, this research examines the implications of socio-economic status on spatial practice in local parks by comparing the two cases studies. The two parks the object of this research belong to different socio economic status areas. The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ is briefly examined at the larger metropolitan level. However, for the purposes of this research, the examination of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ is largely limited to its impacts on local parks, especially the two local parks researched. The reach and depth of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project in local parks and the involvement of local communities in this project has rarely been documented and for that reason this research recognises that this approach is an important theme worthy of examination.

This research adopts the concept of spatial practice to refer to socio-spatial relationships. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical underpinnings related to spatial practice. For the purposes of this research spatial practice is understood as a process that integrates the social and spatial dimensions that include urban, political, administrative, cultural, and environmental elements in a holistic manner. The issues emerging from spatial practice in local parks are examined by understanding the relationships between the parts that constitute spatial practice, the physical space of the park, and local communities, as a whole. Issues concerning specific groups using parks, or specific features of local parks are explored to the extent of the relationships between them. This research acknowledges that issues concerning specific dynamics in terms of social groups or uses could be explored more in depth, even independently
from each other. However, the interest of this research is to explore the relationships and interactions between the elements that constitute spatial practice in local parks because these interactions provide an in-depth understanding of people’s everyday lives.

This research is a multidisciplinary study that focuses on urban studies. More specifically, this research adopts and addresses issues in urban management and governance, sociology, anthropology, architecture and environment and behaviour fields. The efforts by the two municipal administrations and the range of projects they initiated can be seen as a part of the broader movement in Latin America and elsewhere to improve quality of life by introducing urban management measures (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota, 2000; Richard E Stren, 2000; Richard E. Stren & McCarney, 1992; Valladares & Coelho, 1995; Viviescas, 2001). The provision of urban parks, their maintenance and administration falls within the area of urban management. However, one of the elements of urban management is the actual usage that residents make of their urban spaces (Altman & Low, 1992; Arden & Thorne, 1980; Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992; de Certeau, 1984). This thesis focuses on those uses, analysed through Lefebvre’s framework of spatial practice. By doing so this research adds a socio-spatial perspective and understanding to urban management through the phenomenon of public space provision. It makes use of conceptual and methodological tools from environment and behaviour studies (Altman & Low, 1992; Zeisel, 1984), anthropology (S. Low, 2000; Setha M. Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Taplin, Scheld, & Low, 2002), architecture (Lynch, 1960; Montezuma, 2003) and sociology (Fals Borda, 2000; Lefebvre, 1974; Liggett & Perry, 1995; Mejia Pavony & Zambrano, 2000) to construct the socio-spatial perspectives that could contribute to urban management initiatives.

1.3 Justification of the research

There are a number of reasons for conducting this research. The first reason is that Colombia is one of the least studied countries in Latin America (A. Gilbert, 1996; Richard E. Stren & McCarney, 1992; Valladares & Coelho, 1995) and urban research in the country is limited. The researcher believes that research is a powerful tool to understand urban dynamics; therefore it can become instrumental to urban planning
and management in Bogotá. The second reason is that qualitative approaches to urban phenomena in Colombia have emerged only recently. Qualitative research offers opportunities for in-depth approaches to perceptions, experiences, beliefs, and other concerns of people’s everyday lifestyles. These types of approaches have been rarely studied in Colombia and Bogotá and for that reason they are important to conduct.

The third reason is that public space has been identified as an important part of the lives of residents from Bogotá. The city has high density and high levels of poverty. Consequently, public space is a basic need for residents’ leisure, recreation and entertainment. This research also identified that appropriately designed and constructed public space influences residents’ lifestyles and affects positively people’s quality of urban life.

The fourth reason is that socio-economic differences in the city have also been identified as a strong feature that has not been dealt with qualitatively. Generally, studies on class issues from Bogotá (A. Gilbert, 1996; J. M. Gilbert & Szuchman, 1996; Silva, 1998; Viviescas, 2001) reflect the large differentiation between wealthy and disadvantaged people, but they have not approached the different lifestyles product of this socio-economic differentiation. The fifth reason is that ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project has produced an interesting transformation in the public space and social fabric of Bogotá. Hence, the project marked an important change in the city that has rarely been analysed in a qualitative way. The sixth reason is that there are a number of theoretical approaches to urban lifestyles that are adequate underpinnings for examining experiences in local public space in innovative ways. The next section provides the theoretical framework guiding this research.

**1.4 Conceptual framework**

The following definitions explain how some of the concepts used in this research are approached within this study. These definitions have been examined from a multidisciplinary perspective for that reason they have been specifically adapted to this research in a way that contributes to understanding socio-spatial relationships in local parks in the context of Latin America, especially in the context of Bogotá.
**Spatial practice** is the process in which people interact with the space they use in their everyday life. Spatial practice refers to the socio-spatial relationships established at the sensorial level (Beard, 1997; Lefebvre, 1974). It involves reciprocal interactions between physical space, social, economic, political, environmental and cultural elements. Spatial practice develops through time and evolves in a way that continuously shapes the space in which it happens (Soja, 2000). Spatial practice also shapes communities or the social groups that experience such spatial practices. Spatial practice reflects the characteristics of the community or group that engages in activities in specific physical spaces.

**Modernisation** refers to the process of changing conditions of the society through the implementation of new technologies, social, economic and political structures, and innovative knowledge (Garcia Canclini, 2001; A. Gilbert, Hardoy, & Ramirez, 1982; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). For the purpose of this research modernisation is understood as the process starting with the influence of the modern movement in Latin America from the 1950s. In this research we refer to modernisation of urban management and planning, architecture, political structures, democracy, social fabric, economy and cultural identification (Dussel, 1996; Garcia Canclini, 1995; Jaramillo, 2003).

**Post-modern city** refers to the development that cities experienced after the ‘Modern movement’ and post-industrial revolution (Scarpaci, 2003; Soja, 2000; Zukin, 1991). This concept is closely related to the concept of postmodernism in architecture, which was a response to the Modern movement. Post-modern architecture became a critique of the principles of the modern movement, mainly because they were considered too rational and did not respond to the reality of the human experience. The Post-modern city reflects the combination of elements that include colonial spaces, urban spaces resulting from the modern movement and contemporary spaces resulting from a mixture of ideas, attitudes and styles. In the social sciences post-modern cities are cities that experience multiculturalism, popular cultures, dominance of mass media and the market and combinations between global and local issues (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Jaramillo, 2003; Silva, 1998; Stevenson, 1998).
This research recognises that Latin American cities are different from cities in other regions because of their history, development, and cultural, social, economic, environmental and political characteristics. Some cities are more influential than countries; most of the archetypical global cities in the world such as New York or Paris manage highly complex economic, political, social structures within them. Latin American cities have long been included in major western scholarly research studies. However, they have always been analysed under western parameters, especially from developed countries. The majority of studies, including this research acknowledge, the complexity and hybridity of Latin American cities. Often, when Latin American cities are evaluated under the standards of the developed world in regards to quality of life, the result is the image of chaotic, unliveable, and marginal urban settlements. (Silva, 1998) provides a reflexion of the urban phenomena in the Latin American context in contrast to the Western paradigm.

In the XIX century the archetypical city was Paris. In the XX century it has been New York. Now, at the beginning of the third millennium, the third world cities are becoming new archetypes: chaos, violence, misery, hunger and murder… We [Latin American Cities] will never be as Paris or New York. On the contrary they are becoming every time more like us, they look more like Bogotá, Rio de Janeiro or Mexico City. We are the future and that is our difficult privilege.

This view of Latin American cities as new urban archetypes is both pessimistic yet challenging. The image of these cities is generally presented in a negative way, highlighting their problems but at the same time the passage above denotes hope and challenge in the sense that there is a great potential for development of these cities, even under such an unconstructive representation. However, the research for this thesis acknowledges that theoretical underpinnings from the Western paradigm are useful to creating adequate Latin American theoretical paradigms when contrasted and contested with empirical local research.

As archetypes of the third millennium, Latin American cities are worth study to a much greater extent that they have been. Their complexity and hybridity need to be understood through empirical approaches. It is important not to dismiss the quality of the research conducted until now, but it is also important to include more empirical
and theoretical work to scholarly research. To understand that contextual and empirical knowledge about public space in Bogotá and specifically two neighbourhood parks in the city is the main purpose of this research.

The local perspective, or grassroots understanding of their own reality, and community approaches to the city are important concepts that need to be included in the body of knowledge in urban Latin American studies. There is a small, but growing amount of studies of this character (Barbero, 2000; Buraglia, 1998; Coyula, 1996; De Soto, 1986; Dussel, 1995; A. Gilbert, 1996; A. Gilbert et al., 1982; Greenfield, 1994; Jacobi, 1989; Jaramillo, 2003; Jones, 2004; Kelly, 1993; S. Low, 2000; Mejia, 1992; Montezuma, 2003, 2000; Morse & Hardoy, 1992). Their significance underscores the need of city governments to understand citizen’s perspectives and lifestyles in order to create policies that adequately fulfil the needs of residents and improve quality of urban life in a more participative and empowered manner.

Over the last three decades, there has been an increasing preoccupation with the challenges that Latin American cities face. This preoccupation has produced a progressive and continuous change in management, urban landscape and social fabric in the urban sphere. A number of initiatives have been conducted in various cities, with varying degrees of success, such as ‘Participatory Budgets’ in Recife, Brazil, and ‘Curitiba Master Plan’ in Curitiba, Brazil, among others (Friberg, 2002; Lieberherr, 2003). These two initiatives represent two different urban experiences; ‘Participatory Budgets’ originated from the ‘bottom-up’ or the community, whereas the ‘Curitiba Master Plan’ was a technocratic approach implemented by the municipal government. However, these initiatives have demonstrated that despite the different approaches in their implementation, when people understand, accept and engage in such initiatives they tend to be successful and contribute to the urban quality of life.

Urban management and governance in Latin America is becoming topical not only in terms of the initiatives that have been taken place but also to the current urban research agenda (Richard E Stren, 2000). One such example of research on urban management initiatives is the ‘greening’ of public services in Mexico and Italy (Schteingart & d’Andrea, 1991). Another example is the municipal management of public services in medium-sized cities in Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Peru,
Brazil and Dominican Republic which concluded that these processes are mainly technocratic and rarely involve communities’ ideas (Rodriguez & Velasquez, 1994). Recent research has acknowledged that residents’ participation is necessary for successful and sustainable urban management initiatives. Thus, urban research could increasingly contribute to the improvement of urban governance initiatives in Latin America.

1.5 Bogotá

Bogotá is a special case in Latin America (A. Gilbert, 1996). It is the capital of Colombia and as the capital city has the national government headquarters, symbolically it is a primate city but in practice it is challenged by two other cities in Colombia. Demographically, Bogotá has been transformed in only 50 years; in 1938 the population was 300,000 inhabitants, in 1999 the population was more than six million inhabitants. The urbanisation process in this city has been very complex, mainly because of class differences and the difficulty of providing services to the poor, (Skinner, 2004). However, a number of commentators have predicted a better future for Bogotá because it has the potential to improve in various dimensions of planning, namely, urban, environmental, governmental and social, (A. Gilbert, 1996; Montezuma, 2000; Richard E Stren, 2000).

Beginning in 1996 the urban management of the Bogotá underwent major changes after the election of an academic, philosopher and mathematician, as a mayor, Antanas Mockus. His biggest contribution was the development of the initiative named ‘Cultura Ciudadana’ or ‘Citizens’ culture’. This initiative in broad terms consisted of a pedagogical experiment about teaching citizens to understand and to respect the norms to live with tolerance and conviviality. This mayor had unorthodox ways to apply his initiatives but it produced significant results, for example the decrease in deaths from crime to half between 1996 to 2000 (Mockus, 2002). In the electoral period that followed, another innovator was elected as a mayor of the city, Enrique Peñaloza.

Enrique Peñaloza focused on the execution of a great number of infrastructure projects in the city, including avenues, sewage systems, water supply, construction of
new schools, libraries and the consolidation and construction of a metropolitan network of public space. These recent initiatives have led to some innovative research on the development of the new dynamics of the city. The research for this thesis focuses on one of those initiatives, ‘Parks for Learning How to Live’. This was a municipal government project that the administration began in 1998. It was a plan for constructing and restoring thousands of parks in the city and in addition providing cultural events and activities. This project aimed to reach all parts of the city and improve the quality of the public space and, by extension the quality of urban life.

Because of the significance, as well as national and international coverage of these initiatives, Bogotá has witnessed important changes that are important to explore and analyse, especially at the neighbourhood level. This research explores the changes at the neighbourhood level on the assumption that the neighbourhood is the unit or the level in which citizens live and better understand their urban experience. The initiatives were applied to the city as a whole trying to reach most of the population, but the consequences of these initiatives can be more specifically seen in the smallest unit of citizen’s interaction, the neighbourhood and the parks. Parks serve as public forums for community interaction, and are the places where the transformations can actually be reflected and exercised. This research assumes that Bogotá has witnessed an urban transformation in the last decade and it is an appropriate time to examine the impacts of this transformation at the local level of parks and neighbourhoods.

1.6 Methodology

By using an adaptation of Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (REAP), the cases studies of two parks explore how the dynamics of spatial practice occurred in local parks after the implementation of the municipal project for improving public space in the city, ‘Parks for learning how to live’. REAP is a qualitative methodological approach that has been used in health research, urban research, and environment and behaviour research. It consists of the combination of ethnographic methods such as observation, interviews, mapping, drawings, diagrams, and transect walks, among other methods. These methods are systematically designed in order to provide an integrative view of the research theme from the perspectives of different stakeholders in a rapid timeframe. REAP are the methodological response to the
traditionally lengthy ethnographies conducted in the field of anthropology. Therefore, REAP have provided new opportunities for multidisciplinary research, development of qualitative approaches to research, systematic combination of ethnographic methods, possibility to be used in different fields, and the opportunity to gather information from multiple perspectives (Abate, 1992; Leitmann & World Bank Urban Management Programme, 1994; Setha M. Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Ndolamb, 1992; Pearson & Kessler, 2000; Taplin et al., 2002).

One of the hoped for strengths of this research is its methodological approach. It consists of a qualitative exploration of two cases studies of two different parks in Bogotá and during two periods of intensive fieldwork. This research takes into account the socio-economic stratification of the city. Socio-economic exclusion is a recurrent situation in all Latin American cities and it is also a large social concern for the city, and often an obstacle for effective city planning. This research replicated an adaptation of REAP, that includes observations, street and in-depth interviews, children’s drawings and behavioural maps and document analysis in the two parks. One park belongs to a wealthy socio-economic background and the other is from an underprivileged socio-economic background.

There are various purposes for the use of the adaptation of REAP to this specific research. These include the verification of data, accumulation of a greater amount of data in less time, and the possibility to explore spatial practice from different perspectives. The significance of the social and spatial perspectives examined in an integrative way enriches the research design. The reason is that despite the methodology mainly being developed from social sciences research it also includes architectural analysis that contributes to a deeper understanding of the place and its spatial practices.

This research design is comparative, since we have various points for comparison, two parks, two socio-economic status, and different perceptions from users. This research analyses the perceptions of park users and their spatial practice in parks, compares the similarities and differences in the two parks, and identifies users’ perspectives regarding the government initiative ‘Parks for learning how to live’. The research design involves REAP for data collection and the generation of categories for
analysis from the data respond to an interpretive approach to data analysis. This interpretive approach generated categories for analysis from the dialogue between the data gathered through the combination of methods, and the assumptions of the researcher regarding spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá.

1.7 Limitations of the research

The limitations of this research refer to some issues that emerged from its conceptual framework and methodological approaches but were not covered because they were outside the scope of the research. These limitations are however identified as potential themes for further research. The first limitation refers to REAP as the methodological framework for this research. REAP is a methodological design that fits between traditional urban ethnography (Whyte, 1955) and action research methodologies (Fals Borda, 1999, 2000). REAP does not involve the long periods of fieldwork necessary for traditional urban ethnographies. At the same time REAP does not necessarily engage research participants in the way that action research does. REAP, as used in this research, involves short but intensive periods of fieldwork in which the researcher gathers the data in the least intrusive way in order to gather data in its natural context.

Second, the analysis of information has a somewhat arbitrary structure by age groups that may seem limiting in terms of critical interpretation and cross examination of issues. However, structuring the analysis of data by age groups resulted from the interpretive analysis used in this research and followed recommendations provided in the literature on the analysis of qualitative data (Silverman, 2001; Wolcott, 1995). A number of different frameworks for presenting the data were attempted and in all these attempts the most clearly organised approach was by age groups and for that reason, the structure by age groups was selected for the presentation and the analysis of the data. It is important to highlight that approaches to recreation, recreational needs, perceptions of parks, and uses of parks vary significantly at different ages and life stages. Consequently, analysing research participants’ spatial practices in parks according to their age was the more systematic and clearest approach, and the one most appropriate to the data itself.
The third limitation refers to the lack of differentiation of spatial practices by gender in a society that is strongly demarcated by gender. It is necessary to develop a general framework of the spatial practice in local parks in order to have a background for the analysis of gender differentiation in parks. The research for this thesis provides an innovative background which has not been researched before and for that reason it needed to cover the foundational themes in regards to spatial practice in parks. Developing gender differentiation more fully as a theme would have expanded the scope of the research from socio-spatial relationships to more issues which would have required a comprehensive coverage of literature that would fall outside the urban management and environment and behaviour studies covered in this thesis. For that reason it was proposed as a potential theme for further research.

The fourth limitation refers to the deliberate attempt to gather data from the local stakeholders in both case studies. This research aims to identify and analyse local perspectives in relation to parks. It is acknowledged that local parks belong to a municipal and metropolitan structure but until recently the local perspective has rarely been adequately incorporated in the planning and design of public space. Apart from park users and community stakeholders, the research participants included an architect involved in the design of parks and a parks officer from the municipal administration. This research evaluates the program ‘Parks for learning how to live’ and discusses the municipal administration of Bogotá from the bottom up, at the local level specifically. Thus, it was not necessary to interview the initiators of recent urban initiatives in Bogotá. It was more important to contrast the already well known perspectives of Mockus and Peñaloza with the perspectives from the local communities. The points of view of these two mayors have been reasonably well documented in the media, and this data was gathered for the research and used within document analysis.

1.8 Outline of the thesis

This thesis has been structured as follows: Chapter 2 conceptualises the notion of socio-spatial relationships, especially spatial practice, as an integrative approach to examine local parks and communities. It recounts urban research in Latin America
and emphasises the implications of theoretical approaches originated in Latin America on public space.

Chapter 3 explains the characteristics of Bogotá. It defines notions of parks and recreation in Bogotá, and describes two initiatives, ‘Cultural Citizenship’ and ‘Parks for learning how to live’ as recent examples of urban and social transformation in the city. Chapter 4 identifies the research questions, and presents REAP as a methodological framework for data gathering and analysis. REAP was adapted to this specific research by combining these ethnographic methods: document analysis, observation, mapping and interviews, following an environment and behaviour research perspective. Chapter 4 also outlines the framework for data analysis.

Chapter 5 describes and analyses the data about Villa Park. This data is organised under five main topics of analysis and the perceptions of different age groups of users: children, teenagers, adults and elders. Chapter 6 describes and analyses data from Niza Park following the same structure as the analysis for Villa Park. Both chapters are organised around five main themes identified from the data and the researchers suppositions. These themes are, interactions between people in the park; interactions between people and the park; uses and activities in the park; administrative socio-political issues; and identity and sense of belonging.

Chapter 7 discusses the key findings of this research in two dimensions. First a comparative dimension taking into account socio-economic status. The second dimension is the evaluation of the impacts of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ at the local level. Chapter 8 concludes this qualitative exploration by responding to the aim of the research, answering the research questions regarding spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá, differentiation of parks according to socio-economic status, and the implications and impacts of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ at the local level.
1.9 Conclusion

The recent transformations in public space and social interactions in Bogotá are interesting themes worthy of examination, especially in an integrative ways that links spatial and social transformations. Local communities, participatory processes, and improvement of quality of urban life are research issues that have not been extensively studied in the context of Bogotá and for that reason they are relevant for this research.

The approach to study socio-spatial relationships in parks of Bogotá through the concept of spatial practice is an innovative approach to research that has rarely been undertaken in the Latin American context. This research has also established connections between theoretical approaches in order to provide an appropriate conceptual framework. The concept of ‘spatial practice’ from Lefebvre (1974) is the concept that serves as the main matter for investigation. In the Latin American context a number of approaches and research studies have been influential to the understanding of public space in Latin America, two of these approaches are ‘Philosophy of liberation’ by Dussel (1996) and ‘Hybrid cultures’ by Garcia Canclini (1995).

The methodological approach that guides this research contributes to the understanding of local phenomena by exploring the perspectives of different stakeholders through the combination of ethnographic methods. The use of REAP contributes to visualise the field in an integrative way because the combination of methods and the combination of perspectives created an integrative general perspective of spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá. The interpretive analysis of the data, in which the assumptions of the researcher and the data are in constant dialogue in order to generate categories of analysis that respond to a variety of perspectives, is beneficial for this research. Chapter 2 defines and provides a framework of the theoretical underpinnings that guide this research. It develops linkages between theoretical approaches to public space in Latin America, urban quality of life and socio-spatial relationships. These linkages are innovative and have rarely been related to urban research in Latin America.
Chapter 2: Public space, a holistic conceptualisation

Lake at Bogotá’s Central Park during the Summer Festival in August
2.1 Introduction

In the 21st Century, also known as the era of cities, it is estimated that half of humanity, 3.2 billion people, live in cities (Sachs-Jeantet, 1994). However, urban standards of living have been deteriorating, due to the difficulty of ensuring urban quality of many municipal services in highly populated and rapidly growing cities. In order to engender more liveable cities, urban administrations have attempted to diminish the impacts of problems such as environmental degradation, poverty, alienation, shortage of housing, and transport and public space deficiencies (Carr et al., 1992; A. Gilbert, 1996; Montezuma, 2000; Penaloza, 2001). Latin America is not an exception to these trends, and because of its development the region presents strong urban characteristics that offer potentialities and challenges for the achievement of liveable cities (Penaloza, 2001; Richard E Stren, 2000).

Although there is a long history of urbanisation in Latin America, contemporary Latin American cities have been characterised by an extremely rapid urbanisation process. During the second half of the 20th Century these cities, particularly primate cities1 in most countries, witnessed a population explosion caused mainly by internal rural-urban migrations and high fertility rates (Durand & Pelaez, 1969; Morse & Hardoy, 1992; Munoz, De Oliveira, & Stern, 1973; Myers, 1997; Turner, 1969). As a result of this rapid urbanisation, and external (mainly economic) influences, Latin American cities present a number of problems in their governmental structure, urban landscape and social fabric. These shortcomings impact significantly upon public space, because public space is the shared space in cities where social differences are often confronted.

1 Usually in Latin America power has been concentrated in one main city in each country that is named ‘Primate City’; this is a characteristic of most of the Latin American countries, except for Brazil.
and contested. These challenges in the public sphere have been evident in transport, urban environment, public space use and infrastructure (Montezuma, 2000).

This review examines the theoretical approaches that have contributed to understanding public space in Latin American cities. The dynamics that have affected public space, especially urban parks, and urban public life are also examined. Four main arguments in the conceptualisation of public space in Latin America have been identified. The first argument is the conceptual fragmentation of cities that assumes physical space and social fabric to be separate entities rather than a holistic or integrated phenomenon (Beard, 1997; Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1974; Robins, 1991; Short, 1991; Soja, 2000; Stevenson, 1998; Zukin, 1991). This conceptual fragmentation impacts upon the conceptualisation of public space because public space is the structuring element of cities in their physical dimension. The second argument involves the concept of spatial practice as a tool for integrative analysis of urban public space. The third argument refers to the lack of identification of Latin American urban space and the challenges of identifying local ways of understanding local public space in the region (Barbero, 2000; Dussel, 1996; Garcia Canclini, 1995; A. Gilbert, 1996; Hardoy, 1992; Zambrano, 1990). The fourth argument refers to the bottom-up approaches to public space based users perspectives and local communities’ views and the scarcity of such studies.

The organising concept that structures the analysis of the research for this thesis is spatial practice. The conceptualisation of spatial practice, as defined in Chapter 1 and further explored in this chapter, is central to this review of literature. Spatial practice in public space is examined. Subsequently, the conceptualisation of public space in Latin America is discussed. Finally, the influences of theoretical approaches to the public sphere originated in Latin America are linked to spatial practice in public space.

This chapter has been divided into four parts that correspond to the examination of the four arguments identified. The first part develops the ideas on the contemporary fragmentation of cities. The second explores the concept of spatial practice from a holistic perspective in contrast to the fragmented visions of cities. The third part of the chapter analyses understandings of Latin American urban public space through an
overview of the regions latest urban research and some theories originated in Latin America. The fourth part reflects on a bottom-up understanding of spatial practice in public space.

2.2 Urban fragmentation and public space

Contemporary discourses about cities have emphasised the fragmentation of the urban realm in all its forms, physical, social, political, economic, and cultural (Zukin, 1991). Latin American cities have experienced fragmentation since their foundation. In fact, the foundation of Latin American cities generated fragmentation of the relationship between native dwellers and their natural environment (Dussel, 1995; Zambrano, 1990). This section examines the tendency of contemporary cities to become more fragmented and the implications of this fragmentation to public space.

Fragmentation of cities in their physical dimension impacts upon public space because public space is the physical element that structures the shape of cities and connect their parts. This research addresses how spatial practice occurs in public space, specifically parks because by understanding this process in public space, it is possible to understand if public space can contribute to structure the physical form of cities in a large scale and improve the everyday life of residents in a small scale.

Contemporary multidisciplinary discourses on cities have explored the fragmentation of the urban realm in the Western tradition. Public space is directly influenced by either fragmentation or unification of the structure of cities because it is the space that connects places, fills places, define hierarchy of places and contain the public life of residents of cities. A number of studies note that fragmentation is a natural and necessary contemporary approach to cities; for others the reunification of the elements of urban fragmentation is necessary to recover liveable cities. As Zukin (1991) suggests, the conjuncture of social, cultural, and spatial changes has recently been the most exciting theme to those who write about cities. These debates argue for both, the contribution of post-modern discourses to reunify an integrated concept of urban milieu and the contribution of these discourses to emphasise a fragmented perspective of the post-modern city. In other words post-modern approaches have argued for positions, fragmentation and unification of the urban milieu.
Robins (1991) suggests that the post-modern city is an attempt to recover a sense of urbanity, territoriality, identity, urban community and public space which has been lost in the urban process. He notes that post-modern discourses acknowledge the fragmentation in the urban realm and he considers that these discourses may attempt an integration of elements. On the other hand, Hall (1989) laments the character of postmodern cities:

*The city- privileged scenario of the modern experience for Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin- transformed into the anonymous city, the sprawling city, the inner city the abandoned city...*

This comment highlights that fragmentation produces the loss of the urban experience (Stevenson, 1998). This loss is commonly related to the fragmentation of the urban realm that makes it difficult to understand the city for the resident to live in and for the scholar to study it. Hence, the phenomenon that seems to be occurring is that residents are limiting their urban experience to a small area in which their everyday lives occur. Commonly the spaces of reference of resident’s urban experiences are public spaces such as parks, streets, and plazas, among others.

Short (1991) states that cities are usually represented as unnatural settings for anonymous interactions of alienated population. This idea has been evident in a number of studies (Barbero, 2000; Carrion, 1998; Davis, 1994; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). The loss of the urban experience is an issue that seems to affect cities and residents in negative ways, therefore is not desirable. This research recognises that in the public space, the urban experience is expressed at its best; it is in the public space where the urban experience can be recuperated through encouraging social interactions in public spaces.

Post-modern discourses in urban studies, aim to explain the social process of dissolution and redifferentiation of cities and how they become a metaphor of the urban experience (Zukin, 1991). Modern societies changed remarkably the general conceptualisation and form of cities and implemented the logic of industrial production as an important part of the urban process. This new logic, the process of
dissolution and redifferentiation of cities, encouraged a termination of traditional spatial identities and their renovation in new and different directions (Zukin, 1991). Public space experienced such process of dissolution and redifferentiation and affected the dynamics of such space. For instance in Latin American cities, modernisation incorporated large scale parks that residents did not feel identified with because their size made them alienated (Montezuma, 2000).

A number of arguments show how cultural appropriation becomes a strategy of enhancing economic value in cities (Harvey, 1989; Soja, 2000). These arguments reinforce the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of the post-modern city. There is rarely an integrative conceptualisation that reunites social, spatial, cultural, political and economic components, despite the fact that there have been a number of attempts for integration of the elements that constitute the urban realm (Alexander, 1964; Altman & Zube, 1989; Brown, Perkins, & Brown, 2003; Castells, 1983; J. M. Gilbert & Szuchman, 1996; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Herzog, 2004; Setha M. Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Stevenson, 1998; Ward, 1990b). This research recognises that public space plays an important role in the integration of cities in their physical form and in their social fabric. Public space needs to be shared and used; it needs to connect physically the different parts of the city. At the same time it needs to provide the environment for people’s interactions, otherwise it becomes alienated, dangerous and undesirable.

Other discourses (Castells, 1983; Martinotti, 1994; Sachs-Jeantet, 1994) acknowledge different types of urban fragmentation. Contemporary cities in these discourses are often places of exclusion, racism, violence and separation. These problems are explicitly reflected in public space. As Sachs-Jeantet (1994) argues, there has been a shift between the paradigm of inequality to the paradigm of fragmentation, resulting from urban exclusion, isolation, poverty pockets. These claims are supported by a number of studies (Garcia Canclini, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Hardoy, 1992; Myers, 1997). This different type of fragmentation, mainly characterised by exclusion, suggests that physical fragmentations and social isolation are closely related. Again these segregation and exclusion can be observed in public space and challenges the use of public space for improving conviviality and tolerance (Stevenson, 1998). The majority of these approaches explore ways to overcome such
fragmentation and argue that a shift in theorisation and normative change are necessary to avoid segregated and excluding effects in cities and in public space (Sachs-Jeantet, 1994). However, the majority of these studies have not envisioned the possibility of changing these negative trends by improving public space in its physical, social, cultural, economic and political dimensions. This research acknowledges that it can be a positive strategy to improve the urban limitations such as fragmentation of space and social isolation.

2.3 Socio-spatial relationships

Socio-spatial relations have become part of analysis within different fields such as cultural studies, sociology, urban studies and architecture (Sanjek, 2000; Silva, 1998; Soja, 2000; Stevenson, 1998; Zukin, 1991). The research for this thesis acknowledges that socio-spatial relationships, especially in public space, are a vital issue to study because they integrate a number of elements that have been analysed independently. This research also believes that the concept that best examines socio-spatial relationships is the concept of spatial practice. This concept offers a holistic approach because it integrates space and social fabric in the urban context.

This research considers the concept of spatial practice as a key concept for the understanding of the relationships between the physical space of parks, park users, park administrators, and municipal government. More specifically this research uses as a framework the conceptualisation of spatial practice developed by Lefebvre (1974). It is clear that Lefebvre’s ideas are founded on Marxist philosophy, and the context in which they were developed is the context of the expansion of capitalism. Therefore, his emphasis is on understanding physical space as a commodity resulting from the capitalist system. However, the interest of this research is to understand spatial practice as the process in which people use and perceive space. In this way Lefebvre’s notion of spatial practice may be instrumental to understand the trends of urban fragmentation widely held in post-modern discourses. Furthermore, the research for this thesis focuses on Lefebvre’s ideas on spatial practice, not on his broader approaches to the production of space.
The concept of spatial practice explains the everyday experience of people in the physical space, in Lefebvre’s words:

*The spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it.*

Lefebvre (1974) proposed a conceptual triad formed by ‘representational spaces’, ‘representations of space’ and ‘spatial practice’. Representational spaces include: uterine images, childhood memories, dreams, and symbols, such as holes, passages, and labyrinths (Mitchell, 2003). This concept refers to spaces lived through associated images and symbols. Representations of space on the other hand, refer to relations between lived space and conceptual frameworks. Conceptual frameworks are originated from the need of society to understand the space they live in and the relationships that are established with and within it. These representations are the domain of professionals of the space, sociologists, urban planners, geographers, and architects (Liggett & Perry, 1995). Spatial practice refers the way in which economic, political, social and cultural processes generate society’s space. It also refers to the most practical-sensorial nature of space and the ways it is used (Beard, 1997).

In the long term, spatial practice contributes to cultural identification and reflects the society that occupies that space. Through spatial practice people express environmental attitudes and in that way shape social relationships. Spatial practice is ever changing. It changes in time, according to cultural values and it adapts to the needs of the society. In Lefebvre’s (1974) words:

*The places of social space are very different from those of natural space in that they are not simply juxtaposed; they may be intercalated, combined, superimposed, they may even sometimes collide.*

In reference to urban space, and the way it has developed since the industrialisation, Lefebvre (1974) argues that the production of space is industrial in nature, and further suggests that, space acquires characteristics of reproducibility, repetition and reproduction of social relationships and these forces precede natural production, and
nature itself. Lefebvre (1974) gives a hierarchy to social relationships and reveals that
the social component of space transcends the physical space. At the same time
complementary and indivisible relationships are maintained. Spatial practice has
cohesiveness and can only be assessed empirically (Beard, 1997; Ligget & Perry,

Space is a historical social development; it is a social or architectural product, which
it is created and recreated according to society’s mode of production and ideologies.
Spatial practice comes directly from the sensorial world; that is observable,
experienced with the senses and lived in the every day life (Beard, 1997; Certeau,
tends to be highly abstracted as less attention to spatial practice is given and more
elaboration of conceptual frameworks is generated. He envisions an alternative spatial
code\(^2\) that revokes the trend to fragmentation, separation, and disintegration (Beard,
1997). At the same time Lefebvre (1974) acknowledges that such change is only
possible when it comes from the spatial practice. In his words,

...a social transformation to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a
creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language, and on space...

In the process of production of space, the element that configures such a process is
spatial practice. The continuous interaction between the society and the space in
which society is embodied is what drives revolutionary changes in the shape of space
and ways of production of space. For that reason it is significant to study spatial
practice in-depth (Beard, 1997; de Certeau, 1984). In the sensorial milieu, this process
of interactions constitutes a unity, an indivisible system where the parts are
meaningless without each other. Spatial practice is observable, and analysed at
different levels, in architecture, city planning, and urban studies; at the same time
architecture and city planning are part of spatial practice (de Certeau, 1984; Ligget &
Perry, 1995; Mitchell, 2003).

\(^2\) Spatial code refers to the representation of space that builds up in history and defines the
notion of different spaces. For instance urban code related to industrialisation and rural code
related to a more feudal mode of production.
This research refers to socio-spatial relationships using the term ‘spatial practice’ and understands that physical space and social fabric have the same relevance and influence each other. Physical space influences people’s behaviours and attitudes at the same time that social dynamics influence and change features of the physical space. Because of the complementary and reciprocal relationships between people and physical space in spatial practice, this research acknowledges that the process of spatial practice has a holistic nature. This means the process makes sense as a whole because of the relationships between its parts. The following section explores theoretical approaches specific to Latin American cities and public space.

2.4 Urban Latin America

This section presents theoretical underpinnings contributing to the conceptualisation of public space in Latin American cities. Urban fragmentation discussed earlier in this chapter is also characteristic of Latin American cities and it is not a new phenomenon in the region. Jaramillo (2003) notes that recognising the contemporary city requires a multidisciplinary ability that permits us to comprehend its hybridisation. She also argues that most of the theoretical approaches to cities in Latin America are ‘adopted’ from the Western tradition, and that the Western tradition does not reflect or respond adequately to Latin America’s reality and therefore does not offer the possibility of autoanalysis (Barbero, 2000; Carrion, 1998; Fonseca, 2001; A. Gilbert, 1996; Jaramillo, 2003; Montezuma, 2000).

These views highlight two limitations regarding the cultural identity of Latin America as a region. First, the lack of a theoretical standpoint that addresses Latin American phenomena appropriately; and second, the fragmentation and hybridisation that urban Latin America faces (Barbero, 2000; Garcia Canclini, 1995; Jaramillo, 2003; Rama, 1984). This research acknowledges that these two weaknesses relate directly to a ‘developmental delay’ that the region is immersed in, as being part of the so-called ‘developing world’ or ‘third world’. Public space reflects in the physical level the identity problems of urban Latin America because they have often been designed and constructed following foreign models; at the same time, the activities that they contain have been externally influenced.
2.4.1 Urban research in Latin America

Urban research in Latin America has emphasised the continuous dependency of the region on external forces since colonisation, when it was first integrated into the European-centred international system (Greenfield, 1994). After the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation, economic and cultural on Europe and the United States continued. These influences have shaped urban life and the physical appearance of urban landscapes (Herzog, 1990; Myers, 1997). However, this research recognises that the replication of the urban characteristics of cities from the developed world is an unrealistic endeavour in urban Latin America. This is because of the lack of resources to maintain such cities and the traditional social, economic, political and cultural structures that do not sustain the replication.

Urban research in Latin America has shifted across themes since the 1960s. These themes have varied in scope and scale of analysis. Some of the most representative themes in urban research include: the duality between countryside-city and its impact on the urban sphere, economic dynamics, and political and social phenomena (CENDES, 1968; Durand & Pelaez, 1969; Friedman, 1966; Hauser, 1961; Turner, 1969). The rural-urban duality affects cities in demographic terms. This research also assumes that this duality affects the everyday experience of citizens because when rural dwellers move to cities they transfer their rural practices to the urban setting. This research beliefs that changing the mindset from being a rural dweller to being a citizen is a difficult transition in terms of personal experience. This duality plays a significant role in regards to community identity because people tend recreate rural values when living in cities (Friedman, 1966; Hauser, 1961; Turner, 1969). These early studies produced mainly quantitative data related to numbers of migrants, increasing populations, and demographic trends. However, this data did not generally elaborate on specific impacts on resident’s lifestyle and other qualitative characteristics of the new urban populations.

During the 1970s, urban research addressed economic dynamics and the coverage of basic needs (CENDES, 1968; De Soto, 1986; Garza & Schteingart, 1978; A. Gilbert & Ward, 1985; Santos, 1975). Urban planning became one of the main concerns for researchers, planners and administrators. In the 1980s, Latin American urban research
explored political and social dynamics; for example lack of sense of community, low trust in institutions, criminality and violence. Poverty and social segregation were the central themes for years as they impact strongly on the general urban environment. (Carrion, 1998; Carrion & Hardoy, 1986; Castells, 1983; Castillo, 1984; Cuervo, Jaramillo, Gonzales, & Rojas, 1988; Jacobi, 1989; Tolosa, 1991; Ward, 1990a).

In the 1990s, metropolitan phenomena were increasingly superseded by a focus on more particular issues. These particular themes included the local government, urban management, neighbourhood participation, microenvironments, quality of urban life, and citizen and neighbourhood identification (Morse & Hardoy, 1992; Myers, 1997; Sanjek, 2000; Richard E. Stren & McCarney, 1992; Valladares & Coelho, 1995). However, these urban studies tended to focus on social issues without giving them a spatial dimension (Armus & Lear, 1998).

The research agenda since the 1990s (Richard E. Stren & McCarney, 1992; Valladares & Coelho, 1995) is based on the understanding of new social dynamics, the analysis of impacts of structural changes on the urban scene, the spatial practice in cities and social participation. Further studies need to be more comparative, to extract the relationships between problems, solutions and initiatives (Richard E Stren, 2000). The research for this thesis explores issues emerging from spatial practice in local parks such as the role of public space in everyday life, people’s use of space, and interactions in it and administrative issues that derived from spatial practice, in a holistic way. This perspective has rarely been explored in research on Latin America as other empirical studies exclude either the spatial context of the social issues or social issues from the spatial urban context, and has rarely examined public space.

2.4.2 Influential ideas originated in Latin America

The research for this thesis considers that the two following issues are highly influential to spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá. The first theme is that Latin American cities are the result of the imposition of a foreign urbanisation model and for that reason the Latin American cultural identity is challenged in its urban physical space. The history of the urban landscape in Latin America recounts how objective of the foundation of cities was to recreate European cities in a totally different
environment. More recently, this trend has persisted, by copying cities from developed countries, often as a part of official efforts to attract foreign capital (Hardoy, 1992). There is a concern, among some scholars and policy makers in Latin America that cities and the built environment should represent and affirm Latin American culture (Davis, 1994; Myers, 1997; Scarpaci, 2003; Ward, 1990b).

The second theme is that urban space in Latin America has reflected social and economic forces in physical settings. Since colonisation, social segregation has been a strong feature of urbanisation. In colonial times, the city shape reflected the organisation of powers and the social pyramid, in that wealthy families and institutions were located around the main square and poor people in the periphery (J. M. Gilbert & Szuchman, 1996; Zambrano, 1990). Currently, these structures persist as neighbourhoods that physically represent the social and economic status of their residents (Buraglia, 1998; Lopez & Ibarra, 1997).

As a result, communities have developed in isolation from one another, without a strong sense of urban cohesion (A. Gilbert, 1993; Mitchell, 2003). This trend reinforces the idea of urban fragmentation that has been discussed earlier in this chapter. For instance, urban peripheries in Latin American cities are generally neglected by governments, they have illegal origin and do not count on the basic services and infrastructure (Sachs-Jeantet, 1994). Other areas, on the contrary, reflect high standards of living and established urban space. This contrast reaffirms the physical separation of communities in Latin American cities in which they rarely interact with each other (Barbero, 2000; De Soto, 1986; Saldarriaga, 2001; Turner, 1969).

These two issues impact upon public space and parks because on the physical level, public space is many times, the result from adaptations of foreign models, and in local areas parks reflect the socio-economic status of the area where they are located. This research acknowledges the replication of foreign public space as a repeated process in the development of Latin American cities; therefore, this research will explore the repercussions of such replication of public space at the local level. Furthermore social, economic and spatial segregation in Bogotá is strong and for that reason it constitutes one of the premises that will be explored in this research.
Urban Latin America has experienced a high influence of foreign, external models in its physical and social structures. For that reason it is important to identify some theoretical developments originated in Latin America. These approaches have contributed to understand the relationships between physical space and social fabric especially related to public space. Two theoretical approaches from and about Latin America are relevant to this specific research. They are the ‘Philosophy of liberation’ (Dussel, 1996) and ‘Hybrid cultures’ (Garcia Canclini, 1995). These two theories approach contemporary Latin America especially from the 20th Century when the region experienced a rapid process of modernisation in the urban physical structures and social structures. Despite the fact that these theorisations go beyond explaining socio-spatial relationships, some of their ideas are relevant to understand socio-spatial relationships in the Latin American context.

‘Philosophy of liberation’ understands Latin America as being a periphery of the Western world. Dussel (1996) notes that peripheries cannot develop in the same way as the dominant cultures and for that reason developmental theories such as modernisation do not offer a solution for advancement. Dussel (1996) argues that peripheries need tools for a transition from oppressed to liberated to establish a new order. Modernity could not achieve such transition because modernity offers to advance towards a better position within the same context. Latin America has embraced modernisation in an attempt to become a well-developed region. However in over 500 years of history this shift has not occurred. For example, in non-spatial contexts such as politics, economics and cultural issues, modernisation could not transform older colonial structures (Arango, 1989; Dussel, 1996; Scarpaci, 2003). Dussel (1996) notes that democracy, when implemented over corrupted power practices is not a real democracy, therefore it represents a failure of modernisation, considering democracy a modern idea. This means that for the region to achieve a developed state it is necessary to generate other strategies perhaps from within the region.

This research understands that ‘Philosophy of liberation’, when applied to public space shows that public space in Latin American cities has been neglected in a system where private space are the dominant space. Modernisation transformed the image of
cities, especially the image of the public space. However, lack of understanding about public space, lack of planning and lack of maintenance have displaced public space out of the local system where private space represents the totality and public space has less importance (Dussel, 1996). This research recognises that public space in Latin American cities has been in disadvantage and for that reason this research aims to understand the current position of public space in regards to private space. Perhaps new strategies for understanding and using public space in a variety of ways may be that passage of liberation. ‘Philosophy of liberation’ acknowledges that transformations can only be produced from within the oppressed entity (space-people) and for that reason this research considers that investigating spatial practice in the local parks may provide elements for potential transformation of public space from local communities.

Another theoretical approach that aims to understand the Latin American context is ‘Hybrid cultures’. Latin American countries became a result of the juxtapositions and interconnections between indigenous traditions, catholic colonial hispanism, and modern political, social, educational and communicational actions (Garcia Canclini, 1995). Thus, the structures that Latin America now has are hybrid. ‘Hybrid cultures’ explain the effects of the juxtaposition and interaction of different beliefs, traditions and principles on the culture, and urban, political, economic and social structures in Latin America. This theory appeared as a critique of the way modernisation occurred in Latin America by implementing new ideas in political, cultural, social and economic aspects of society. However, this happened while maintaining old traditions that contradicted and were detrimental to the effective implementation of modern structures (Garcia Canclini, 1995; Jaramillo, 2003; Rama, 1984).

Processes of hybridization in Latin America started since the colony with ‘syncretism’ or the way the catholic religion was combined with indigenous and African beliefs (Garcia Canclini, 1995). Urban space has also experienced these processes of hybridization during the development of cities. This hybridization is reflected in the way modern structures juxtapose to colonial and Europeanised environments. The complexity of the process of hybridization has increased contemporarily mainly because mass media and globalisation have encouraged the combination of cultural practices especially in urban settings and public space.
It is difficult to define and describe hybrid public space because of the endless possibilities in which hybridity tends to occur. However, it is possible to analyse some of the exchanges and impacts of hybridity on public space. One of these impacts is the role of mass media in regards to the way they envision and present urban space, usually the public space. Furthermore, the reach of mass media to enter into the private space is a second impact of how hybrid popular cultures and hybrid public space enter the private space of houses through television, radio and newspapers (Garcia Canclini, 2001; Scarpace, 2003; Silva, 1998). These impacts shape public space, popular cultures and their spatial practices by encouraging interactions and exchanges and therefore facilitate more hybridity.

The theory of hybridity acknowledges and analyses complex interactions between public space, popular cultures, traditional structures, mass media, the market and other national and transnational exchanges that continue generating more exchanges and more hybridity. This research recognises that hybridity is a characteristic of spatial practice in local parks because there are a number of ways how local communities interact and exchange perceptions, beliefs and values in the public space. It is an advance to understand the hybrid nature of public space in Latin American cities and to open innovative lines for further research on public space and the Latin American culture, such as the bottom-up understanding of spatial practice from local communities.

### 2.5 Bottom-up perspectives

The conflict between the meanings that people attach to their surroundings contrasted with the constructed meanings from the social sciences presents another way to approach the conceptualisation of public space in Latin America. Sanjek (2000) suggests that ethnography has been developed in various areas of anthropology as a tool to analyse cognitive and perceptual processes in social groups. He also notes that ethnographic work may link ideas, perceptions, cognitions and ideals from people in the everyday life with the articulated body of knowledge about these issues.
Sanjek (2000) notes that ethnography is a useful methodological tool to gather data from everyday experience. In other words, ethnography approximates the researcher to a bottom-up understanding of the phenomenon studied specifically people’s and communities everyday lived experiences. In Bogotá, planning of the urban public space has included more of the top-down approach or government and experts perspectives and little of the bottom-up understanding or local communities perspectives (Mitchell, 2003; Montezuma, 2000; Penaloza, 2001). Moreover, communication between people and administrators seem to be only one way and many times misunderstood. Thus, the need to confront these two perspectives or points of view is necessary for future development of urban public space.

Scholarly research can offer the opportunity to juxtapose the bottom-up understanding with the top-down approach in relation to public space in Latin America. To do so, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research to identify and analyse the bottom-up understanding of public space in Latin American cities. This research believes that this bottom-up understanding is evident in the spatial practice in parks. More specifically, spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá provides the bottom-up understanding of how public space is experienced in the framework of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project.

This review has analysed spatial practice in a holistic way where space is not separated from social activity. According to Sennett (1976) the public sphere is the space where one unveils him/herself at the same time that others reveal themselves. It is the space where individuals are simultaneously observers and are being observed (Certeau, 1984; Sennett, 1976; Stevenson, 1998). This exposure to the public eye in the public sphere opens up a set of alternative ways for citizens’ and neighbours to relate to one another. These ways to relate in the public sphere constitute the spatial practice of public space. Furthermore, public space is the only space that contains the development of collective processes; the public sphere is ultimately a collective invention (Mitchell, 2003; Silva, 1998). Public space is generally the setting for expression of collective ideas, for example public protests. Silva’s claim agrees with Lefebvre’s assertion that space is a vehicle for social revolutions and transformations. This research explores the extent in which these ideas of public space being a motto of social transformation.
2.5.1 The local context

The size of Latin American cities opens a debate about the differences between local and global levels. In this research the idea of locality is understood as an original unit of community or culture, it is centred, authentic and natural, whereas global is understood as external, artificial unauthentic and exposed (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). This research identified that in terms of space, the ideas of local and global play an important role for a comprehensive understanding of the spatial dimension of cities and public space. The global understanding refers to large-scale initiatives. The local understanding of urban space and public space encompasses to the social dimension of the space and includes the involvement of community and social interaction within the locality (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

Local communities, especially when they are in disadvantage, have always been actively involved in their own development (Setha M. Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Morse & Hardoy, 1992; Richard E Stren, 2000). More recently, urban governments are more open to support these kinds of local initiatives. For example, Bogotá’s government has periodically been promoting community forums. Urban issues that directly affect neighbourhoods are discussed and the community is informed about the policies that drive Bogotá’s management (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000). Urban governance emerged from analysing spatial practices in local parks as issues that affect the community and refers to the provision of services that arise when they are using these facilities (Jaramillo, 2003; Richard E Stren, 2000).

Participation of urban society is becoming a part of the discourse of urban management in the Latin American context. It is reflected in more local and community involvement and involvement in decision-making (Mockus, 2002). Recent research has defined local democracy as the action of local participation and empowerment of communities. However, because of the complexity of these dynamics there is not certainty as to how this occurs from city to city (Richard E Stren, 2000). Such mechanisms are new in the Latin American context and for that reason this research considers the importance of investigating to what extent they are effective.
2.5.2 Neighbourhoods

For the purposes of this research it is important to identify how local communities have developed in Bogotá. The extent and population of cities is so large that the urban experience is rather lived in small clusters. These clusters correspond to the areas that people relate to; they contain their living space, workspace and recreational space. Because of the high socio-economic segregation of Latin American cities, most residents are familiar only with the part of the city that reflects their own status and they seldom visit other areas that do not correspond to their urban experiences and social status (A. Gilbert, 1996; Jaramillo, 2003; Jones, 2004).

The history of Latin American cities, especially in Bogotá, define neighbourhoods as autonomous areas that offer basic services to the community that inhabit them, but dependent administratively to a metropolitan management. Neighbourhoods began as administrative cells or units, however they have also become indivisible social and spatial cells of Bogotá (Buraglia, 1998; Zambrano, 1990). During the Colony, the city was divided in parishes, organised in a spatial hierarchy. Their components were a small plaza with a chorro or fountain and a church. All the houses that used these services were located around them (Zambrano, 1990). The church was the sign of power, the fountain was the water provider and the plaza was the public space in which to socialise. In this way each of these parishes functioned as independent structures of the city in a local perspective.

Neighbourhoods retained the colonial structure for years, however with the advent of the modern urbanism, planning and technological advances contributed to create new forms of neighbourhoods (Viviescas, 2001). The modern urbanism encouraged the construction of high-rise buildings, liberating space in the ground level to generate public space. (Buraglia, 1998; Viviescas, 2001) In this period that extended from the 1950s to 1970s; the morphology of the city changed and density started to play an important role because it increased at the same time that public space and green areas in ground floor increased thus, occupation of land decreased and density rose. The complex of apartments was created as the model of neighbourhood in the modern movement (Buraglia, 1998). These complexes differed from the traditional neighbourhood in the social interactions that occur because people live very close
each other in units but they do not know other people and their community sense is not strong. Spatially, the functionality of the complex of apartments is very effective, however, this type of living tended to isolate people from their neighbours (Arango, 1989; Fishman, 1982).

The impacts of the modern urbanism are present in the public space in various ways. Modern urbanism aimed to remove traces of old architecture to be replaced by high technology constructions. For example in the 1950s, Le Corbusier proposed a radical change for Bogotá, which included the removal of the colonial centre. Although rejected, other parts of the city were constructed following this modern urbanism (Arango, 1989). In terms of public space, the plaza was still an image of colonialism but at the same time it was the public space par excellence. Thus, the modernisation of the colonial plaza involved renovation of its image with modern, minimalist design. The expansion of cities, the flourishing of urban planning, and the increasing importance of urban life promoted the design and construction of parks among other important public works such as roads and bridges. The principles of sanitation, functionality and specialisation of the urban space dominated these transformations (Zambrano, 1990).

The transformation of Latin American cities during the 1950s to 1970s has challenged the understanding of the concept of neighbourhoods, in social and spatial perspectives (Buraglia, 1998). The social perspective refers to neighbourhoods in their social structure whereas the spatial perspective refers to neighbourhoods in terms of the urban form, housing, public space and amenities. In the social perspective the neighbourhood is its residents, in the spatial perspective the neighbourhood is the set of spatial elements. However, both perspectives are complementary, neighbourhoods are both its residents and the urban structure that serve residents (Buraglia, 1998).

The combination of social and spatial components is necessary to understand a concept of neighbourhoods for the Colombian context, taking into account both the social and spatial approaches (Buraglia, 1998). Neighbourhoods contribute to integrate family life, to create identity in the local community and to improve social relationships such as solidarity and support (Buraglia, 1998). This research recognises
the social nature of neighbourhoods and local communities and identifies local public space and parks as the main places where people can exercise socialisation.

A district in Bogotá can include neighbourhoods that combine colonial hierarchies and power relationships between residents within an urban space that can be either high-rise buildings or low-rise houses (Arango, 1989; Buraglia, 1998; Coyula, 1996; Viviescas, 2001). Neighbourhoods are sometimes difficult to identify physically but residents always have clear boundaries from one neighbourhood to another. Often these boundaries strengthen with socio-economic differences that can be physically identifiable. Socio-economic segregation in Latin American cities is a embedded phenomenon that requires more understanding (Coyula, 1996; Cuervo et al., 1988). Instead of argumentations against it, this research recognises that it is necessary to explore socioeconomic segregation as part of everyday urban lifestyles in Bogotá and how they affect spatial practice in public space.

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review has addressed issues concerning the conceptualisation and understanding of public space in Latin American cities, especially in Bogotá. The first issue addressed urban fragmentation that affects public space negatively and often leads to isolation and alienation of residents. The second issue addressed in this literature review is the understanding of spatial practice as an integrative, holistic process that combines public space and communities that use that space in an intrinsic manner. This is mainly because spatial practice refers to the sensorial-empirical field and attempts to explain how socio-spatial relationships occur in the everyday. These concepts are the framework to the formulation of the first research questions for this study which investigates reciprocal relationships between parks and users.

The third perspective examined in this literature refers to the way Latin American cities have responded to fragmentation. More importantly, they testify to how urban planning without appropriate conceptualisation have produced inefficient, incomplete and inadequate initiatives that far from solving problems tend to generate more chaos. Furthermore, theorisations of Latin American culture originated in Latin America, in regards to cities and specifically related to public space are analytically rich and
provide tools for theory development. The ‘Philosophy of liberation’ (Dussel, 1996) and ‘Hybrid cultures’ (Garcia Canclini, 1995) are two relevant theories to approach public space in Latin America. This Latin American perspectives form the foundation for the second question of this research, which investigates the impacts of socioeconomic segregation in spatial practice in local parks by comparing two parks from different socioeconomic status.

The fourth issue that contributes to tighten this examination of theory with regards to urban public space is the influence of local understandings or bottom-up perspectives in top-down or government perspectives. Bottom-up perspectives have the potential for examining different theoretical approaches applied in a sensorial level. The differentiation of the top-down perspective from the government and the bottom-up understanding from communities are the framework for the third question of this research, which evaluates if the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project fulfilled park users’ needs at the local level.

The following chapter presents the background and context of Bogotá. This city is the specific area where this research takes place and for that reason it is necessary to present the elements that made Bogotá the case worthy of examination. The next chapter is developed around the general urbanisation process that the city has experienced and more specifically how urban public space has been transformed during Bogotá’s urban development.
The ‘Renaissance Park’, built as part of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project

Chapter 3: Bogotá and the democratisation of public space
3.1 Introduction

Bogotá is an unusual case among Latin American cities. Despite the fact that the city largely shared the urbanisation process of the Spanish colonisation in the Americas, over time it developed unique characteristics. Bogotá is not a major export centre and it is located in the middle of the country high in the mountains which made communications and economic trade difficult for a long time (A. Gilbert, 1996). However, Bogotá has always been seen as a cultural centre where government headquarters and the most important universities and cultural organisations of the country are based. Thus, Bogotá represents the cultural political and civic centre of Colombia.

The urbanisation process that the city underwent since its foundation is a determining factor for the dynamics that continue to affect the city. A major factor is the social class separation, first supported by legislation during the colony but later becoming institutionalised in patterns of residential development (Zambrano, 1990). Citizens of Bogotá stereotype themselves in terms of wealth and poverty and it is reflected in how the different socio-economic groups are geographically distributed in the city. In the north live the wealthy and better-educated people who have better jobs and high standards of living. In the south are the poor who have difficult access to education, high unemployment rates and low standards of living.

Bogotá took a long time to realise the potential of its public space. Since colonial times, residents considered the city cold, cloudy and rainy and for that reason people developed an indoor approach to leisure and entertainment. However, in the last two of decades residents have developed a culture for outdoor entertainment, principally because of the recent development of public space in the city.
Since 1996 successive municipal governments have been implementing initiatives addressed to use the potentialities of Bogotá. These programs have provided better scenarios for the quality of urban life. In the past, citizens had reservations about using urban public space because they believed that public spaces were insecure and in poor condition. These initiatives have arguably changed citizens’ attitudes and led to significantly more activity in the public sphere.

This chapter presents the characteristics that have made Bogotá a special case in contemporary urban development in Latin America. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an informative description of the city. This research acknowledges that the urban experience is in part an individual construct and for that reason it is not the aim to show the ‘mood’ of the city. For instance, some may view Bogotá as a violent and aggressive city, others as a segregated and alienating city, and others as a good model of urban development in Latin America. Thus, there is not a single, unitary ‘mood’ of the city. Some of these issues are discussed throughout the thesis but not in this chapter. The researcher’s view on the mood of the city is developed after the data analysis in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

This chapter begins with a description of the general characteristics of Bogotá. This description introduces the main features of Bogotá and emphasise in their urban structure and development and social composition. Then the recent transformations that the city has witnessed will be examined. These transformations focus on the two most important governmental initiatives in the city in the past decade, mainly ‘Citizens’ culture’ and ‘Parks for learning how to live’. Finally, there is an introduction to the two parks researched in this research and the general characteristics of the neighbourhoods where they are located.

### 3.2 General characteristics

Colombia is located in the Northwest of South America, it limits with the Pacific Ocean and Panama on the West; The Atlantic Ocean on the North; Venezuela and Brazil on the East; and Peru and Ecuador on the South (see Figure 3.1.). The geography of Colombia has facilitated a rich regional and cultural variety. The history of Colombia, however, has been marked violence. The internal conflict between
rebels, paramilitaries, and the military have produced devastating effects to the country especially in rural areas. In spite of the internal conflict, the cities of Colombia have acceptable standards of life in general terms.

Figure 3.1. Colombia and the rest of the world (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world.html)

Bogotá is the capital of Colombia. Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada founded the city of ‘Santafe de Bogotá’ in 1538 during the second period of the Spanish colonisation, called ‘mainland phase’ (J. M. Gilbert & Szuchman, 1996). Since its foundation, Bogotá has been an important urban settlement in the region. It is located in the middle of the Colombian Andes, at an altitude of 2 640 meters above sea level (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000). A distance of 969 kilometres separate Bogotá from the Atlantic Ocean and 136 kilometres from the Magdalena River, the most important river in the country (Instituto Nacional de Vias, 2005). These distances have made transportation and communications difficult, especially because mountains cover most part of this area (see Figure 3.2). Despite its geographical limitations it has been the administrative, educational and cultural centre of Colombia since its foundation.
3.2.1 The city

Bogotá is the sixth largest city in Latin America (Skinner, 2004) Table 3.1 shows the 10 biggest cities in Latin America by population. The physical area of the city increased from 900 hectares in 1900 to more than 30,000 hectares in 1996 (A. Gilbert, 1996). According to Bogotá’s municipal administration it has an area of 1732 km² or 173,000 hectares including the greater metropolitan area, the metropolitan area is 30,736 hectares (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000).
Table 3.1. Largest Latin American cities by population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population in 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Mexico City (Mexico)</td>
<td>18.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Sao Paulo (Brazil)</td>
<td>17.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Buenos Aires (Argentina)</td>
<td>13 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)</td>
<td>11.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Lima (Peru)</td>
<td>7.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Bogotá (Colombia)</td>
<td>7.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Santiago (Chile)</td>
<td>5.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Belo Horizonte (Brazil)</td>
<td>3.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Guadalajara (Mexico)</td>
<td>3.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Porto Alegre (Brazil)</td>
<td>3.7 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population division, Urban agglomerations 2003)

The greater metropolitan area of the city is divided in urban perimeter and rural areas. The urban perimeter is dense in population and construction; the rural area includes a number of small towns that have, however, been informally incorporated into the structure of the city, physically and functionally, in a process known as conurbation (A. Gilbert, 1996). The urbanised area of the city is approximately 30km from north to south and 16km from east to west, and that contains a population of 7.3 million inhabitants. This population surpassed the estimate for 2005 of 7 185 889 (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005) Density characterises Bogotá. The following satellite image of Bogotá shows in dark green the Eastern hills, the Bogotá River on the West end and the urbanised and dense areas in purple (see Figure 3.3).
Figure 3.3. Satellite image of Bogotá (http://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/%7Esmall)

3.2.2 Weather

Bogotá has daily average temperature of 14º C with high levels of humidity. However, temperature can vary from 8º C to 25º C (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000). The city has no strongly differentiated seasons, however, there are some periods of rains in March, April and May and winds in August (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000). The early history of Bogotá is characterised by customs, clothes, food, and other features related to cold weather and an enclosed life style. Moreover, public
space remained as dangerous and poorly maintained (J. M. Gilbert & Szuchman, 1996). However, it has changed in more recent years and the city has become more open to public life and more adapted to warmer climate conditions.

3.2.3 Urban structure and environment

The urban growth of Bogotá started from the colonial centre and developed first to the north, then to the south and after that started expanding towards the west. This growth has maintained a class differentiation in the city where wealthy people live in the north and disadvantaged people live in the south. The north of the city counts on better urban conditions than the south, consequently, the price of the land varies significantly in these two areas. The west side of Bogotá has been the most recent development.

The city is settled in the Bogotá’s savannah. The ecosystem of Bogotá has two main elements, a water system of lakes, channels, rivers and wetlands, and two mountain formations, the Eastern hills, and a smaller one, the Suba hills. The Eastern hills are a very vast and visually significant formation that characterises the landscape of the city. Their proximity to the city, their vegetation and their size make them a strong point of reference to the residents for orientation purposes and for their image.

The increasing urban density has deteriorated the environmental structure of the savannah (Departamento Administrativo de Medio Ambiente, 2001). High density and the weakness of laws regulating construction facilitated building up over important environmentally sensitive areas of the city over several decades. Many wetlands and riversides have been polluted or drained. Hills have undergone considerable erosion through deforestation or construction activity, and this in turn has added to deterioration of water resources. Wetlands are very important components of the ecosystem of Bogotá because they maintain water levels, vegetation and native animal species in balance (see Figure 3.4).

In the last 10 years the environmental conditions of Bogotá have improved (El Tiempo, 2002). However, maintaining and improving the environmental conditions of the city is a continuous challenge for urban management.
3.2.4 Social structure

Bogotá, in the year 2003 had 7.3 million inhabitants. The overall population density in 1999 was 3,717 persons per km², and by 2005 has surpassed 4,500 persons per km² (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2005). High density means that the provision of public space is vital for Bogotá’s residents.

Bogotá has become a large city only in the last fifty years (A. Gilbert, 1996). Rapid growth began after the 1960s when internal migration started to increase dramatically. Violence in rural settlements led to migration firstly to intermediate cities and then to the capital city. Hence, the population in Bogotá rose from 1,697,000 inhabitants in 1951 to 5,898,000 in 1993 (A. Gilbert, 1996). In addition to migration, factors such as rising life expectancy and the fall in infant mortality contributed to Bogotá’s growth.

Bogotá is the administrative, political and cultural centre of Colombia (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000). Bogotá is unlike other Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires or Lima that dominate most of the economic and commercial activities in the country. They are substantially bigger compared with the intermediate cities and they strongly influence the economic dynamics of their countries. Bogotá is not a primate city and it has not dominated the Colombian economy (A. Gilbert, 1996). Industrial development has centred around two other cities, Medellín and Cali, and coastal cities such as Cartagena and Barranquilla manage the tourism industry and the ports.
Hence, Bogotá became the most important administrative educational and cultural centre without dominating the national economy.

Even without having economic primacy, Bogotá is a culturally dynamic city. The main universities and cultural organisations are located there. It has the category of the ‘Capital District’ and is one of the 1 086 municipalities of the country. The administration is headed by the city council and the mayor is elected by popular vote. The City Council is composed of 40 members and they are the legislative branch of the local government, controlling the local authorities and administration (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000). According to the Office of the Mayor of Bogotá, 67% of residents consider the city as a good place to live. Despite the fact that the crime and violence indicators are significant and the country’s internal conflict has worsened, there has been an improvement in the public perception of public space and the community’s civic culture in the city (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000).

Nevertheless, the city faces severe economic problems, with high rates of unemployment and consequent growth of informal jobs (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000). Bogotá also has a shortage of housing, educational and medical services. In socio-economic terms, the city is very unequal; in 1985 the poorest received only 4% of the city’s income (A. Gilbert, 1996). Socio-economic segregation is profoundly embedded in Bogotá. This segregation is explicit in the urban structure of the city. The wealthy live in the northern area with adequate and attractive urban services and infrastructure and the disadvantaged live in the South where there is a lack of services and poor infrastructure. Moreover, the land prices vary according to these urban, social and economic characteristics. Figure 3.5 shows the spatial distribution of the population in Bogotá according to their socio-economic status. The key for Figure 3.5 is as follows: The arrow signals the North at the bottom of the map. Strata 1 is represented in red; Strata 2 in yellow; Strata 3 in turquoise; Strata 4 in light green; Strata 5 in gold; and Strata 6 is represented in olive green. This map represents the data monitored before 1999. In Bogotá, disadvantaged people live in areas from Strata 1 and 2. Strata 3 and 4 are considered middle class, and Strata 5 and 6 are considered
wealthy.

Figure 3.5. Stratification of Bogotá (http://www.dapd.gov.co/www/resources/dec200-04.jpg)

### 3.3 Urbanisation process and history

The Spanish colonisation is considered the largest urbanisation process of the world, because over 6 000 cities were founded in the Americas in less than 200 years and Bogotá was founded during that period (Zambrano, 1990). The urban model from the Spanish colonisation was mainly a political and military strategy for controlling
territory, populations, and for expanding their power. Physically, the orthogonal grid characterised Latin American cities. The main plaza was the centre of the grid and represented spatial hierarchy. Important civic and religious buildings were located around the plaza and houses were organised in square plots, the closer to the plaza, the higher status that its residents had (Zambrano, 1990). Figure 3.6 shows the image of the colonial Bogotá in a plan by Agostino Codazzi, 1852.

![Figure 3.6. Colonial Bogotá](www.banrep.gov.co/.../bol16/images/plano4.jpg)

The foundation of Bogotá was strategic, Spaniards used to build cities in the same place where indigenous communities had lived and in that way control those populations and use them for labour (Zambrano, 1990). After Bogotá’s foundation colonial social rules were established and enforced. Spaniards had an exclusive social and racial structure in which white people had all rights and privileges and indigenous people had none.

White people could live inside the city and according to their social status they could own properties near the plaza. Indigenous people could work in the city but they had to live outside this area and they could not own land. Since the earliest colonial times, social segregation and stratification in the city has been a visible characteristic and it has shaped Bogotá’s development. This social stratification has always related to the land and the location of the populations in the city. After independence, racial segregation became less relevant because the number of white Spaniards decreased
and there was a growing number of meztizos and mulatos, or mixed races. (Zambrano, 1990) However, the idea of social segregation according to wealth became stronger and has been maintained until now.

The colonial city had designated 8.5% of its area to public space. This seems low under current standards but in colonial times, this proportion was appropriate for the low population, small and compact size of the city, and rudimentary transportation (Montezuma, 2000). Figure 3.7 shows the relative distribution of public space and open private space in the colonial centres of Latin American cities.

Figure 3.7. Colonial centre of Quito (www.andes.org.uk)

The apparition of cars in 1905 and trams in 1910 changed the shape of the city dramatically (Montezuma, 2001, 2000). The first sidewalks appeared and changed the nature of public space. Before this change in transport and traffic, pedestrians used most of the street space. After cars appeared, most of street space became space for the cars. In relation to the characteristics of streets in the colonial time, pedestrian public space decreased by 70% to make room to public and private automobiles (Montezuma, 2000). With the increment of the automobile, roads and highways were the first great scale development projects of the time. Because of this fast changes in the structure of public space, urban legislation emerged as a necessary tool to manage the growth.

Like many other Latin American cities, Bogotá has had weak urban planning. Moreover, to the extent that there has been planning, each new plan has tended to ignore past actions, and this has created ruptures and disconnections between current and past urban development. For example, the urban and suburban rail system had an
important impact on the expansion of the city from 1920s to 1970s. However, with the increasing use of private vehicles, the rail system was abandoned, with the loss of the significant rail infrastructure that had been in place, and the consequent increasing pressure on urban transport. Bogotá is, in many ways, the history of an accelerated adaptation of foreign models, without consolidation of any of them (Montezuma, 2000).

The history of the city has also played an important role in Bogotá’s social characteristics and urban form. Historical events have changed the shape of the city, and strengthened its socio-economic differentiation. There are a number of key historical moments in the city’s development. The events that have impacted the city with the most force have been rebellious episodes as well as attacks against civilians.

The first episode that changed the course of the history of Bogotá was that of the riots on the 20th of July 1810. These riots occurred between Spaniards who had arrived from Europe and the people born in Bogotá (Mejia Pavony & Zambrano, 2000). The tension between these groups was founded on the inequalities in which they lived and the riots added to the empowerment of the locals against the Spanish domination. The events of the 20th of July generated a movement that eventually culminated with Colombia’s declaration of Independence in 1819 (Mejia Pavony & Zambrano, 2000). After independence the instability of the political system generated a number of civil wars, one of the most important being ‘The one thousand days war’ (Mejia Pavony & Zambrano, 2000). These wars affected urban residents profoundly and generated a sense of constant insecurity.

During the early 20th Century, the city underwent a period of rapid development, which induced a flourishing architecture, the introduction of electricity and other basic services, the introduction of the first cars and the construction of roads (Mejia Pavony & Zambrano, 2000). This renaissance of the city was remarkable to the point that the city was dubbed the Athens of the South. However, in 1948 the bloodiest and most traumatic episode of Bogotá’s history took place. It began with the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a very charismatic populist leader (Arias Trujillo, 1998). His death raised the anger of residents to the point that a wave of destruction of the city took place. The downtown, which was the wealthy area of the city at the time, was
partially destroyed by the angry mob. This event, known as ‘El Bogotazo’, changed the course of urban, social and economic development of Bogotá. Socio-economic differentiation became stronger and the areas affected by the riots started a process of urban degradation, therefore residents moved to other areas in the city (Arias Trujillo, 1998). Bogotá was no longer portrayed as the Athens of the South and became a city where national conflicts collided.

The second half of the 20th Century witnessed significant changes in the city. One was the extremely rapid demographic growth. This growth was caused largely by internal migrations (Arias Trujillo, 1998). The rural-urban migrations were at the same time the consequence of a period known as ‘La Violencia’ which was characterised by violent attacks against civilians in the countryside as a result of an extreme polarisation between the two main political parties (Arias Trujillo, 1998; Iriarte, 1988). Housing the new residents in Bogotá resulted in a chaotic and segregated complex urban structure and social fabric. In order to relieve some of the housing problems, in 1961 the then US President John F. Kennedy, who was visiting the city at the time, contributed to the funding of a large residential area which became known as Kennedy (Arango, 1989). Despite this housing relief, informal settlements mushroomed in many parts of city, especially towards the south.

During the 1970’s the city experienced some stability and more manageable development but the 1980’s were also marked by violence and struggle. In 1985 a rebel group based in the countryside occupied the Palace of Justice and took people who were in the building as hostages (Iriarte, 1988). The issue escalated rapidly because of the harsh counter offensive from the military which caused the death of dozens of people including civilians, magistrates, soldiers and passers by (Iriarte, 1988). This has been one of the most tragic episodes in the recent history of the city. The second half of the 1980’s were characterised by random bombings organised by the drug cartels as a way to create chaos and as a revenge for the approval of laws against the drug trade and in favour of extradition laws. This short account of the history of Bogotá shows the extent of the struggle of residents and contrasts with the positive developments that have occurred since the 1990’s in terms of urban development, urban pride and improvement of quality of urban life in Bogotá.
3.4 Public space, urban parks and recreation

Since the first urban settlements began in Latin America, the significance of public space has evolved. During Pre Columbian times, the relationship of people with their environment was based in the perception of nature as a sacred entity. Thus, any human intervention in their natural environment followed respectful rules for conservation of the natural equilibrium (Snodgrass, 1990). The Spanish colonial pattern of urbanisation established a hierarchical network of public spaces. This hierarchical network represented the colonial political and social power (Zambrano, 1990). Plazas, boulevards, and streets, formed the colonial public space. In these places, all public life was developed, with little differentiation of activities. For example, weekend market and bullfights occurred in the plaza without distinction. Streets and boulevards originally had a pedestrian character (Zambrano, 1990).

These characteristics encouraged networks of social relationships and lively public life (Saldarriaga, 2001). In the colony, the plaza partially played the role of the park, and parks did not exist as they are now. However, there were surrounding areas where people used to go for relaxation purposes. For instance, the cemetery was a kind of urban park with an active public life based on pilgrimage (Silva, 1998).

Urban parks have acquired considerable importance after the ‘Modern movement’. It was embraced in Latin America after Le Corbusier’s visit to some countries of Latin America including Colombia, in the 1950s. This movement claimed that human’s urban environment and lifestyle should change in a more balanced way avoiding stress from intensive work and designating time for recreation and leisure (Le Corbusier, 1971, c1929). These innovative ideas changed the shape and functions of cities generating a different conceptualisation of parks and public spaces. Latin American cities including Bogotá modernised during the 1950s to the 1970s by developing modern urban projects combined with the traditional urban structure (see Figure 3.8).
Le Corbusier was the pioneer of separating urban activities and organising people’s urban life in relation to where to inhabit, to commute, to work and to relax (Le Corbusier, 1971, c1929). Furthermore, the idea of clearing the ground floor by building high-rise buildings and leaving the ground space for green areas and urban parks permitted the construction of modern urban parks. Le Corbusier went to Colombia in the 1950s and he developed the first post-colonial, modern urban planning strategies for Bogotá. His ideas had an important influence in the future development of the city. However, his urban planning was not completely applied because it included radical transformations such as the complete demolition of the colonial centre (Arango, 1989).

These innovative ideas made recreation part of urban lifestyles and urban parks became the area where recreation was to take place. Recreation refers to the way in which people use their free time for a period of less than 24 hours (Cadavid, 1993). Recreation includes activities such as sports and arts because these contribute to socialisation, health and education of people and communities. The role of recreation and parks as contributors to socialisation and education of communities is central to this research because these elements constitute the heart of spatial practice in parks and contribute to the improvement of quality of urban life.

Recreation is classified in different ways: spontaneous or directed depending on the way it is carried on; active or passive depending on its nature; mass, selective or popular depending on the people who attend the activities and daily or weekly
depending on its frequency (Cadavid, 1993). Some parks are designed for special activities and become thematic for sports or adventure. Others are suitable for a combination of activities, such as neighbourhood parks. They are spaces to enhance public community life more than specialised places to practice a type of recreation. This research examines the extent to which neighbourhood parks respond to diverse uses.

### 3.5 Government initiatives for urban development

Between the theory and practice of recreation and socialisation in urban parks there is often considerable distance. This is particularly the case in Latin American cities, including Bogotá. Despite urban initiatives have always been developed in the city, most part of the planning and execution of such initiatives remains unfulfilled. Parks tend to have inadequate facilities and infrastructure and be poorly maintained. As such, they remain significantly under achieving in their contribution as public spaces for recreation and for the development of neighbourhoods’ quality of life. However, during the last 10 years there have been governance initiatives that have significantly transformed previous trends of social interactions, public space and general spatial practice in Bogotá. These newly applied initiatives can be summarised in two main projects: ‘Cultura ciudadana’ or ‘Citizens’ culture’ and ‘Parques para aprender a vivir’ or ‘Parks for learning how to live’. The short history of the city presented earlier in this chapter contributes to understanding the virtuosity and improvements that these two municipal administrations developed during their terms.

#### 3.5.1 Citizens’ culture

‘Citizens’ culture’ began in 1996; it had a great impact among citizens and was a pioneer initiative that promoted a significant transformation in the way citizens socialised with others. This project attempted to encourage practices of good citizenship, conviviality, tolerance and non-aggressive behaviours among citizens (Skinner, 2004).

Some of the strategies included a curfew imposed on bars from 1 a.m., which attempted to diminish drink driving and therefore car accidents. Second, police
control of firearms in the festive month of December and later, a voluntary handing over of guns. Third, the ban of unsupervised fireworks, only fireworks technicians can deal with fireworks. Fourth, a campaign for creating friendly attitudes among drivers and improve pedestrian’s attitudes (Skinner, 2004). The uniqueness and relevance of this initiative is that they used a rich language full of linguistic codes, definitions, images and symbolisms that appeared to be appealing to people in order to implement this pedagogic process (see Figure 3.9). For example, when people handed over guns voluntarily there was a symbolic ceremony in which each person received a spoon in exchange for the guns. These spoons were made with melted guns, which meant that they were destroying an element for murder to create an element for feeding (Observatorio de cultura urbana & Comision de cultura ciudadana, 2002).

![Figure 3.9. Mime as part of ‘Citizens’ culture’ programs (snarkmarket.com/blog/snarkives/mime-bogota.jpg)](image)

As the conceptualisation of the ‘Citizens’ culture’ from its creators states:

> Belonging to a city is to recognise contexts and in each of those contexts respect the rules. The ownership of the city starts by learning how to use it by valuing and respecting its order and character as collective heritage.

This quote shows how since the mid 1990s Bogotá has been creating and recreating itself as a city where it is possible to live in harmony. At the same time it shows how through language and communication the municipal government transmitted a reconceptualisation of the city. During these years the negative statistics on violence in the city decreased significantly (El Tiempo, 2002). Throughout the development of
‘Citizens’ culture’, a number of games and metaphors were used to encourage positive social behaviour.

The purposes of ‘Citizens’ culture’ included teaching Bogotá’s residents that the rules exist to be respected and more importantly that they need to be respected because they respond to a rationale for living in community. Self-regulation of behaviour was an important aspect encouraged by this administration. This research agrees with the assumption that self-regulation has been often exercised in parks through spatial practice. Mainly because the nature of recreation in parks facilitates community engaging and self regulated practices (Mockus, 2002). Another purpose was to make the urban space a part of the social transformation and encourage a sense of belonging.

This project generated physical and social transformations that exceeded people’s expectations. The sense of belonging to the city was weak until the development of this project and the new conceptualisation of the city transformed spatial practice significantly. The investigation from ‘Citizens’ culture’ revealed some of the rationally that people manage in terms of trust in the law, the government and other citizens and they showed to be negative, therefore, this initiative encouraged positive behaviours for socialisation in Bogotá (Observatorio de cultura urbana & Comision de cultura ciudadana, 2002).

The sustainability of ‘Citizens’ culture’ is highly dependent of the long-term application of these initiatives; however, the difficulty is for other administrations to apply the unconventional strategies applied by Mockus and his supporters. Table 3.2 shows the mayors of Bogotá in the last two decades. The table clarifies that Mockus developed his initiatives in two non-consecutive periods before and after Peñaloza.

There have been a number of criticisms of Mockus’ social experiments. One is that the symbolism used to communicate such social experiments was very difficult for some sectors of the population to understand (Jaramillo, 2003). Mockus is an educator and his ideas sought to teach people basic principles for conviviality and the encouragement to obey the rules. However, his colourful personality and the unconventionality of his approaches gave him the reputation of an eccentric person.
and in a very traditional and conventional city, many did not take his initiatives seriously. Despite these criticisms, the ‘citizen’s culture’ has demonstrated that society can change gradually by learning appropriate behaviours within the community, through setting examples and encouraging people to display self-regulated behaviours in public spaces.

Table 3.2. Recent Bogotá mayors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th>Highlights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992-1995</td>
<td>Jaime Castro</td>
<td>Advanced the proposal for the construction of the Tram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1996</td>
<td>Antanas Mockus</td>
<td>Started ‘Citizens’ culture’ (quit to run for the presidency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-1997</td>
<td>Paul Bromberg</td>
<td>Continued Mockus’ administration maintaining the programs proposed by Mockus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-2000</td>
<td>Enrique Peñaloza</td>
<td>Transformed the city with ‘Transmilenio’ an alternative public transport system to the tram and developed ‘Parks for learning how to live’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2003</td>
<td>Antanas Mockus</td>
<td>Continued ‘Citizens’ culture’ and complemented it with the ‘Observatory of urban culture’ which involved research on urban lifestyles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Luis Eduardo Garzon</td>
<td>His main purpose has been to tackle the poverty and improve the opportunities for disadvantaged residents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


3.5.2 Parks for learning how to live

Urban parks and public space in Bogotá developed following the dynamics of the city but they were not appropriately planned and maintained. The first initiative that concerned public space was the creation of ‘La Cartilla del Espacio Publico’ or ‘The Public Space Booklet’ in 1994. This document was a general inventory of the elements that constitute the natural environment of Bogotá. It also included the first guidelines to regulate and build public space in the city. However, the greatest intervention on public space in the city began in 1998 with Enrique Peñaloza and his work as a mayor.

The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ started in 1998. It aimed to generate public consciousness about the importance of pedestrian public space. The first initiatives applied were highly controversial. They included stopping cars from
parking on pedestrian parks and streets. This decision generated strong criticism from business owners and the public in general from those who were used to parking anywhere at anytime (Skinner, 2004). However, in the long term it demonstrated that stopping cars from parking on the streets and pedestrian paths did not affect commercial activity as many had presumed and it became well accepted.

The second attempt to recover lost public space was to eliminate barriers that residents had built to enclose public space in different areas of the city. This action had to deal with the belief that public space was dangerous and to be able to use it had to be enclosed. Some residents also assumed that they could own the street or park in front of their houses simply because they took care of it or paid their taxes. Residents opposed strongly to this action to the point that on one occasion when the authorities went to a neighbourhood named Luna Park, to demolish a wall enclosing a public park, the residents tried to impede the demolition by standing next to the wall. The demolition went wrong and two people were accidentally killed in the confusion of the demolition (Viviescas, 2001). These actions occurred at the beginning of the implementation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ in 1998.

‘Parks for learning how to live’ had several purposes. The first purpose was to change the image of the city through the completion of adequate physical interventions. The second purpose and the most challenging one was to convince the residents of Bogotá that these interventions were going to improve the urban quality of life in the city. ‘Citizens’ culture’ created an appropriate ground to start transforming public space. Since Bogotá residents increased their identification with the city and sense of belonging, it was generally well received that urban parks were restored, improved, and new parks were built.

The implementation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ began with the recovering of the invaded space. Then the urban management of the city was changed to allow the different government organisations to work in partnerships. Since this change urban management improved significantly. During its conception, the project defined a network of public spaces including parks, riversides, alamedas and bicycle paths that connected the city. Subsequently, parks were classified according to their size and the
amount of people that they influenced (see Figure 3.10). The following stage included the design, construction and restoration of parks and public space throughout the city.

Figure 3.10. Metropolitan network of Parks: ‘Parks for learning how to live’

‘Parks for learning how to live’ has addressed developments in public space at different levels, involving the entire network of parks as a whole and each of its components, namely metropolitan parks, district parks, neighbourhood parks and pocket parks (Departamento Administrativo de Medio Ambiente, 2001). Table 3.3 shows the classification of parks.
Table 3.3. Classification of parks in Bogotá

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of parks</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Parks</td>
<td>These parks are over ten hectares in size. They contain spaces for multiple recreational and leisure activities addressed to all residents of the city. These parks are often located in significant environmental and heritage areas of the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Parks</td>
<td>They are from one to ten hectares in size, they support neighbourhood parks offering specialised alternatives for recreation and sports. Their area of influence includes one or two of the twenty districts that the city has. Each district contains several neighbourhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Parks</td>
<td>They are smaller than one hectare; they are addressed to local communities. Each neighbourhood in the city may have at least one neighbourhood park. They are places to encourage neighbourhood unity and solidarity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocket Parks</td>
<td>They are located in residual places of the city’s morphology. They are mainly small places with grass and vegetation. ‘Pocket parks’ is a term used in the planning literature in English to denote mini parks and is equivalent to the Spanish expression ‘parques de bolsillo’ (Penaloza, 2001).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Parks for learning how to live’ involved the design, construction and restoration of high quality bicycle paths that contribute to commuting of people. It also incorporated the restoration of wetlands and other important ecosystems of the Bogotá savannah.

The group of different types of public space in Bogotá compose a network of public space that connects the city.

Furthermore ‘Parks for learning how to live’ distributed the management and maintenance of parks to relevant governmental organisations, and in that way each relevant organisation could manage their budgets. Thus, the Sports and Recreation Department took the role of managing all neighbourhood parks, which are more than 4 000 parks. The administration ensured the provision and maintenance of parks in the more disadvantaged and marginal areas of the city where the urban conditions are largely inferior to other parts of the city.
The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ has achieved national and international recognition. There have been over 1200 new parks built, and over a million residents visit the parks built or recovered since 1995 (Instituto Distrital de Recreacion y Deporte, 2001). This project challenged cultural preconceptions, administrative practices and transformed spatial practice in the parks of Bogotá. It was an innovative, visionary project that contributed to the improvement of public space and urban life in the city. However, little data has been gathered in terms of how residents have adopted the changes at the local level. In the metropolitan level the image, perception and ways of experiencing Bogotá have been transformed and that is reflected in increasing tourism, increasing cultural activities, and improving governance.

‘Parks for learning how to live implemented a strong program to improve urban conditions in the poorest areas of the city, called ‘desmarginalizacion’ or ‘demarginalisation’. This program intersected with ‘Parks for learning how to live in terms of generation of new public space. However, it included programs on housing, education and other areas of services. In terms of public space, it consisted of improving the poorest areas of the city that lacked basic services, by providing appropriate public space, roads and necessary services. The discourse on ‘demarginalisation’ consisted basically in embracing local standards for good quality of life often by observing the qualities of wealthy areas of the city. It was also important to generate a consciousness of these changes among residents from poor areas of Bogotá and in that way empower them through participation and community work.

With ‘Parks for learning how to live’ Bogotá became a place for entertainment and tourism, not only a place for business and compulsory study for university students. Public space was not only being renovated but also started to become an appropriate place for concerts, sports competitions, even fashion shows, among other activities. The integration of culture with the use of public space generated administrative obligations towards sustaining the cultural activities and sustaining the scenarios. The public administration became more concerned about the urban space, more caring about the residents and more effective in terms of governance (Viviescas, 2001).
An example of an activity that consolidated during ‘Parks for learning how to live’ is ‘Concerts at the park’. These concerts occur regularly, are free of charge and cover diverse cultural needs of ‘Bogotanos’. The most popular of them is ‘Rock at the park’ followed by ‘Salsa at the park’. There are also ‘Jazz at the park’ and ‘Opera at the park’. The concerts involve different age groups and people from different socio-economic status (see Figure 3.11). In that way these concerts are taking advantage of the generally negative issue of social segregation in terms of creating spaces for integration of people from different socio-economic backgrounds and different age groups. Furthermore these concerts are an opportunity for musicians and performers to present their work. This example shows how spatial practice has been transformed in Bogotá at the metropolitan level.

Figure 3.11. Rock at the park (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota, 2000)

‘Parks for learning how to live’ have encouraged a number of initiatives that have been developing since recently. Some of these initiatives are: the office in charge of neighbourhood associations, which is a branch from the Office of the Mayor (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota, 2005); Metropolitan network of libraries (Secretaria de Educacion de Bogota, 2001); an organisation that researches about advances in urban culture (Observatorio de cultura urbana & Comision de cultura ciudadana, 2002) and the Human City organisation that researches and consults issues related to public space, public transport, and alternative transportation (Hurtado et al., 2003).
At the beginning of the Peñaloza administration the drastic changes in the habits of the residents of the city generated negative responses. The programs from this administration were technocratic and applied without extensive consultation. For that reason there was a lot of resistance at the beginning of the projects. The later developments satisfied public opinion, however it was a shortcoming that the initiatives and projects were not communicated early and in a clear manner. Despite the evidence that these initiatives resulted in significant developments in the physical dimension of the city, there are some criticisms related to the administration of the projects. There were governance gaps that left doubts of corruption and poor execution of contracts (El Tiempo, 2002; Jaramillo, 2003). However, in general this administration was perceived as successful and efficient.

### 3.5.3 Sustainability of parks

Sustainability of parks is key to the transformation of Bogotá for a number of reasons. First, in terms of urban planning and urban management, sustainability is an approach that has been rarely taken into account. Chapter 2 discussed that one of the main problems in urban planning of Latin American cities is that initiatives were often interrupted before completion because of a change of administration, or were not continued in an appropriate way.

Peñaloza’s administration, 1997 - 2000, was the first that embraced the idea of long-term sustainability of their projects. With regards to parks, they developed a plan for sustainability of parks. The formulation of the sustainability plan represents an improvement in urban management. The program for sustainability of parks has as main objective the promotion of projects based on shared management between municipal government organisations and the community (Beltran, 2002).

The sustainability program involves the creation of social networks to improve levels of urban governance, encourage the social value of public space and improve urban quality of life in the city (Beltran, 2002). In order to do so, the administration offers technical support and training to local communities. They can make use of that support and training by proposing and carrying out specific projects to improve their
local public space (Beltran, 2002). This process aims to stimulate the self-association of neighbours and transparency with the use of funds. These projects involve strict auditing of how funds are used by the community (Beltran, 2002).

Sustainability of parks was formulated in a holistic way that incorporates social, cultural, environmental, administrative and economic elements. Social sustainability refers to the shaping of social interactions, behaviours, compliance of rules, cultural engagement, recreational activities and all social practices that make parks dynamic and useful places. Cultural sustainability in local parks refers to the special characterisation of each park. It reflects the cultural features that differentiate parks and communities from one another and provides special meanings to parks. Environmental sustainability refers to the conservation of the natural environment within the urban structure in the case of local parks. Administrative sustainability refers to the existence of organisms that ensure the functioning and management of parks. Economic sustainability is based on the creation of resources that make possible the maintenance and development of the environment, culture, and social interactions.

This rationale for the sustainability of parks takes into account a number of important components of the spatial practice in parks. It sees the improvement in public space as the final result, but considers the process the most relevant part. Association of local communities, participation and empowerment are also expected results from the development of these sustainability programs. The way local communities give value to the environment is also relevant for these projects. The incorporation of local cultural values is also part of the criteria for examination. In sum, the initiatives for sustainability of parks are formulated by connecting social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability and the end result is the improvement of urban quality of life in local communities. This formulation incorporates a long-term rationale for sustainability, however, it is important to analyse to what extend these initiatives are being developed in the city. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will examine if these initiatives are taking place in the cases studies for this research.
3.5.4 Land organising plan (POT)

In 1997 the Land organising plan was introduced by the national government in response to the Law 388 on land management. It required that all municipalities with 100,000 inhabitants or more create a strategic master plan, which would determine land use, and private and public investment for a minimum of 9 years. That is how the POT ‘Plan de ordenamiento territorial’ appeared as the principal set of urban planning guidelines for all cities in the country including Bogotá. This plan represented a major transformation in the city, physically and in its urban management. However, Viviviescas (2001) highlighted that although the POT provided the environment for a holistic analysis of the city’s development, the technocratic and ‘piecemeal’ approach employed in its formulation limited its potential. On the other hand, other authors have provided positive evaluations of POT showing it as an innovative government approach in the context of Latin America (Skinner, 2004).

The POT, more than being a new administrative tool for planning and constructing the city, created spaces for conceptualising the model of city that Bogotá wanted to be. This discussion included questions such as if Bogotá should become a more dense city, or the appropriate location of services such as the military bases, the airport, the sanitation dumps. During the drafting of the POT in Peñaloza’s administration (1997-2000) there was lively debate by different sectors of the society, especially scholars and experts on urban issues. However, as a first approximation to an integrated strategy for planning it produced positive advancement in urban development because of the continuity of the initiatives or guidelines stated in this plan. This continuity transcends municipal administrations and for that reason the plan has more opportunity to consolidate.

The issue of participation in planning and other social, political processes in Bogotá is still at an early stage. The changes in governance in the last 10 years have provided some mechanisms to facilitate community’s participation. However, participation of local communities in planning has not been achieved yet. Participatory planning for instance has begun recently with the organisation of public forums to discuss problems in the city. It is necessary to strengthen knowledge, networking and
potential of local communities in order to improve the reach and efficiency of participatory planning (Uniandes, 2002).

3.5.5 Quality of life survey

The concept of quality of life has had a lot of debate in Bogotá, especially in the past ten years when initiatives that changed the social and spatial structures of the city were implemented.

The quality of life survey from 2003 is the latest statistical analysis on issues regarding quality of life in the capital of Colombia. This survey was developed by DANE, the national statistics agency. It presents the opinions of Bogotá residents in regards to a number of issues including health, education, housing and public space, among others. For example in regards to improvement of parks the statistics show that in Engativa, the district where Villa neighbourhood is located, 80.8% of the households consider that there have been improvements in parks in their district while 15.3% consider that there have not been any improvements. In Suba, the district where Niza is located, 75.2% considered that there have been improvements in parks while 13.4% did not perceive any improvements in parks. The remaining percentages in both districts correspond to the households that did not respond to the question (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005).

With regards to the impact of the ‘Citizens’ culture’ program, 72.3% of households from Engativa considered that such programs improved quality of life and 29.9% disagreed. In Suba district 68.5% of the households considered that this project improved quality of urban life and 15.8% disagreed (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005). With regards to participation, in Engativa 63.7% perceived that participation of the local community has improved and 29.2% did not perceived improvement in participation. In Suba 55.8% perceived improvement in local participation whereas 20% did not perceived improvement and 24% did not respond to the question (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005). These statistics show that, in general,
residents from Suba perceived their quality of life on a lower level to the perception of residents from Engativa. However, it is important to highlight that Suba district has households from strata 1 to 5 and a high number of neighbourhoods are poor neighbourhoods whereas Engativa has neighbourhoods from strata 2 to 3 or 4 which means the population belongs more to middle socio-economic background where most basic needs are sufficiently covered.

The general statistics also show that improved people’s quality of life the most was the restoration, creation and improvement of public space (76.2%). ‘Citizens’ culture’ program improved quality of life to 62.9% of the city’s population and communities’ participation occupies the last place in the issues that recently improved quality of life with 51.8% (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005). At the same time the public initiatives that are considered the best and most influential in regards to quality of life are the construction and improvement of parks with a 73.4% of residents believing so. These statistics are an important source of recent data instrumental to both quantitative and qualitative research.

The results of these statistics depict the general perception on residents about the initiatives that have been recently occurring in Bogotá. It seems that ‘Citizens’ culture’ and ‘Parks for learning how to live have been relevant and opinions with regards to them have been favourable because of their contribution to quality of life in the city. However, the survey’s questions show that quality of life in Bogotá has not been examined in a local way or with more detail. This research examines how the improvement of local parks has contributed to the quality of life of the residents of Villa and Niza communities.

3.6 Citizens’ perspectives

The initiative that has examined and documented citizen’s perspective in relation to public space, security, economy among other issues is ‘Bogotá como vamos’ or ‘Bogotá how are we going’. This initiative is independent from the municipal government and periodically evaluates advances and/ or failures of government initiatives in Bogotá. This initiative is organised by ‘El Tiempo’ one of the most
reputable newspaper in the city, in conjunction with private universities. This research addresses the report on public space specifically the one produced in 2002 because it evaluates specifically the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. One of the main issues they discuss in this report is the issue of quality of life in Bogotá.

The concept of quality of life is difficult to standardise in a set criteria. It means it is relative and varies according to cultural values, wealth, lifestyles and evolution of societies. It is clear that every society seeks to acquire a high quality of life that fulfils their needs and contribute to society’s growth. However in diverse and non-equalitarian world, the indicators to measure quality of life vary significantly. In general terms quality of life refers to the reach of the ideals of communities in regards to satisfaction of needs and wellbeing. In countries like Colombia, or developing countries in general, the indicators of quality of life address the satisfaction of basic needs such as housing, education, healthcare, access to jobs and fair income, recreation and public services (El Tiempo, 2002).

Since countries in the developed world have addressed providing basic needs in a generally satisfactory way, the indicators that apply to these countries are unrealistic for developing countries. There are a number of indicators that can be considered when defining how positive is the quality of life in our context. For instance; indicators of the unsatisfied basic needs; poverty line indicators, Gini coefficient; and index of human development are some of the most used in urban analysis. The main challenge that these indicators present to the clear and contextualised definition of quality of life is that they measure quantitative factors that sometimes do not accord to qualitative factors that really express human wellbeing. In ‘Bogotá how are we going’ experts on public space and urban issues have recommended that to be able to consolidate and develop and appropriate structure of public space, the city needs to generate indicators that respond to the context and reality of the needs of people, what can be achieve and how public space will be sustained in long term.

The report of ‘Bogotá how are we going’ from 2002 shows that in regards to achievements in public space during this period, ‘Bogotá how are we going’ presents important data, both qualitative and quantitative. The average of public space per inhabitant in 2000 was 2.83 square metres /inhabitants, and in 2002 was 2.86 sqm/inh.
This measure shows that public space slightly increased during this period. In terms of perception, the survey shows that Bogotá residents assessed parks and green areas, on a scale from 1 to 5. In 2000 the assessment was 3.47 and in 2002 the mark was 3.67. This demonstrates that people’s appreciation for parks increased marginally. Lighting in parks and public spaces was also assessed in the same scale. In 2000 the assessment was 3.60 and in 2002 the mark was 3.88. Some of the recommendations from this report highlight the importance of a creation and rapid consolidation of a program for long-term maintenance and sustainability. Financial resources are already short for these effects, for that reason is important to create mechanisms to ensure sustainability.

### 3.7 Villa and Niza parks

The two neighbourhood parks chosen for this study are part of the large structure of over 4,000 parks that comprise public space in Bogotá. As local parks they present different spatial practices. The specific characteristics of the residents in each neighbourhood shape different ways for using the park and the analysis of these issues is the main theme of this research. The parks are located relatively close to each other, as they are both in the west of the city (see figure 3.12). However, administratively the neighbourhoods belong to two different districts and they display different physical characteristics. Villa belongs to the district named Engativa, in 2003 this district had 796,518 inhabitants. Niza belongs to the district named Suba and in 2003 the population of this district was 805,245 (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005). Both districts contain neighbourhoods of different socio-economic background. However, Suba district has a higher mixture with neighbourhoods on strata 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
Figure 3.12. Location Map for the two parks

3.6.1 Villa

Villa neighbourhood has approximately 2,532 residents (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital, 2003). It belongs to the district of Engativa
and shares services with surrounding neighbourhoods. Villa Park is the biggest and more representative park of the neighbourhood. Villa neighbourhood was created about 30 years ago. Its origin was illegal; land speculators divided the land in plots and sold them for relatively low prices but without supplying any basic services such as water or electricity. Furthermore, the plots were divided without following any urban planning and without complying with municipal regulations. At the time the neighbourhood began, this land was considered suburban or off the city perimeter. However, with the growth of the city in the last 30 years the neighbourhood nowadays is embedded in the city structure. Villa belongs to strata 2, which means their residents pay the second lowest tariffs for water, electricity, telephone, sewage and other basic services. However, at the beginning, this neighbourhood lacked all services. This situation forced people to break pipelines and intersect wires to steal water and electricity respectively.

Physically the neighbourhood is located right next to the ‘El Dorado’ international airport’s landing platform. This location means that the residents of Villa have to deal with high levels of noise. A second impact affecting the neighbourhood is that its soil is soft and inappropriate for housing because it is built on wetlands that were filled with construction waste. Thus, the creation and urbanisation of Villa generated environmental problems to the neighbourhood with floods during the rainy season.

All these deficiencies in the environmental conditions are the result of the initial illegal creation of the neighbourhood in an area of the city that was not apt for residential use. However, because of the speculation of land, and the lack of administrative and political strategies from the municipal administration to control this type of urbanisation, the neighbourhood is nowadays consolidated. The consolidation process has been long and difficult and for that reason residents had to organise associations that negotiate with the government the provision of services, in order to improve their conditions.

The illegal urbanisation process started with the purchase of plots by people with scarce resources. Landowners received money, but buyers did not receive title deeds, they instead got a promise of purchase (Skinner, 2004). This document does not ensure ownership of the land, however because many families did the same type of
contract and generally the unscrupulous developers disappeared then the municipal government had to legalise the neighbourhood after years of consolidation and provide full services without getting the funds that usually should get from developers. Additionally, at the moment of the legalisation of the neighbourhood, people had already been living there for many years, and had built two and three story houses, dusty roads and lacked public space (Instituto Distrital de Recreacion y Deporte, 2001).

This peculiar pattern of urbanisation has a high cost for the city, however regulations have not been enforced and the developers many times count on the support of opportunistic and corrupt politicians. Villa neighbourhood finally obtained legalisation in August 1991. By 2003 it had 680 plots and approximately 2 532 residents; its density was 57.6 plots /hectare (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital, 2003).

The lack of infrastructure means that public space has been sacrificed. However, for the benefit of Villa residents, some of the land located in front of the airport’s landing platform remained empty and with the consolidation of the neighbourhood this area informally became public space. The residents of Villa recognised since the beginning of the urbanisation of their neighbourhood that public space was important in their neighbourhood and used this vacant land as a park, years before its actual recognition and construction as such.

Villa park occupies three consecutive blocks in the neighbourhood. It borders a main road that crosses Engativa district, for that reason it has very high traffic that includes public transport. Across this road is the airport’s landing platform, which generates high levels of noise, however, in past years a rampart was built by the airport’s administration in order to diminish the noise that sometimes was the cause of windows breaking in the nearby houses. On the north side of the park there are houses that often have a ground floor space destined to commercial activity. These houses have a variety of businesses including a bakery, hairdresser, restaurant and grocery store. Because the park is located across three blocks, there are two streets that cut the pedestrian flow in the park and for that reason some areas of the park get to be more used than others.
Figure 3.12 is a collection of images that shows some of the elements of Villa Park and its immediate surroundings. The images are placed according to the photographer’s point of view. The rest of the images placed inside the park and that have an elliptical shape are from left to right: first playground, first sports field, mobile police trailer, second playground and second sports field. This figure aims to present the general characteristics of Villa Park to help the reader to understand the park in a spatial manner. Villa Park will be examined in depth in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.13. Villa Park, Elements of the park and immediate surroundings

Complementary to the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ was the ‘demarginalisation’ program. Since Villa neighbourhood is a strata 2 neighbourhood, its parks were incorporated in the ‘demarginalisation’ initiative. One of the activities performed was ‘Escenarios de excelencia’ or ‘Scenarios for excellence’. This action consisted on praising a number of parks from the poorest neighbourhoods (strata 1 and 2) by showing them as the best examples of local public space. The nominated parks were chosen because they reflected most of the standards of good quality of life. They included: high security; high and convivial use; good maintenance of facilities; cleanliness; good lighting; security for pedestrians; good environment with clean air and gardens; participation and engagement of community with the parks.

These scenarios received that name because the parks are also meant to be appreciated and use by the large of Bogotá residents and in that way this program aimed to tell
people that their local park became a showcase of the neighbourhood in order to make the community proud. Villa Park was nominated as one of these scenarios and was included in a booklet. This recognition made the residents proud of their neighbourhood, maybe for the first time. These follow up activities for the “Parks for learning how to live” project seem to be vital for the long term sustainability of the park and the local community.

3.6.2 Niza

Niza is a neighbourhood located in the north west of Bogotá. It belongs to strata 5, which means it is a relatively wealthy neighbourhood. It was created 30 years ago, as a suburban area of the city. This neighbourhood had urban planning in its origin. Its first residents moved to this area of the city looking for a more natural, less crowded environment. However, with the growth of Bogotá, Niza has been embedded within the city structure. Despite the impacts of recent urbanisation and growth in the area, Niza remained as a neighbourhood with a unique, abundant and established natural environment. Additionally, the neighbourhood is located within an appropriately maintained wetland named ‘Cordoba’; therefore the existence of this wetland provides special environmental characteristics to the neighbourhood. Density is lower in comparison to other areas of the city. Houses are two or three story with generally one family unit per house. However, the recent building of new complex of apartments is increasing the density in the area.

Niza Park is located in the south west of the neighbourhood, at the time the neighbourhood started the park was part of a larger green area of the neighbourhood, however, soon after the consolidation of this neighbourhood there was the construction of two of the main roads of the west of Bogotá. These roads have six to eight lines, because of their traffic and their size they constitute a negative impact to the neighbourhood and to the park. The park had architectural design in the 1970s. However, the apparition of these two roads changed the characteristics of the area therefore, the architectural design could not appropriately respond to these characteristics anymore. As a result, the neighbours decided to isolate themselves from the two main roads by building a fence in the limit of the park with the roads.
For the neighbours this fence is an important element that guarantees their security, despite the fact that it is illegal to build fences in public space. Most of the illegal closures and boundaries built in the city were taken away during the recuperation of public space in 1998 and 1999. However, the fence of Niza Park is still there mainly because of the willingness of the neighbours to keep it.

The ‘Parks for learning how to live’ undertook some work in Niza Park in association with the Botanic Gardens. The project aimed to replace all non-native arborisation with native trees. This project was partially completed in Niza because a number of residents opposed to the cut of some trees. Understandably, they highly appreciate their natural environment and they did not understand the purpose of this replacement of trees. The initiative aimed to protect the natural ecosystem of the city by planting the native species and ensure a long-term sustainability. However, it seems that there was lack of communication among the parties and lack of information. This apathy from the residents towards municipal administration is evidenced in several neighbourhoods not only in Niza. This neighbourhood seems to have potential for community participation but it is a challenge to encourage people to contribute to this type of associations.

Figure 3.14. Niza Park, elements of the park and immediate surroundings

Figure 3.13 shows some of the elements that characterises Niza Park. In the North, East and South of the park there are houses designated only for residential use not
commercial. On the West the park limits with a high traffic road called ‘Boyaca Avenue’. The images in elliptic shape show from left to right: first playground, basketball court, surveillance camera, second playground and kiosk for the security guard. This figure aims to provide a spatial visualisation of Niza Park; the detail examination of the spatial practice in Niza Park is examined in Chapter 6.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the context of Bogotá in general and the context of public space and local parks of Bogotá in particular. This chapter is a transition between theoretical approaches to public space and the empirical data in regards to spatial practice from this research. The first section focused on the general characteristics of the city, including urban and environmental structures and weather conditions. These general characteristics are important to understand the role of parks in the urban structure and the way people relate to public space according to environmental and weather conditions.

The second section of the chapter included a historical review of the urbanisation process of Bogotá as well as a general description of the social fabric. These are two vital elements to understanding socio-spatial relationships, which in this research have been referred as spatial practice. The history of urbanisation of Bogotá emphasises on how urbanisation process and the development of the social fabric have been the result of colonial structures and postcolonial attempts to change the undesirable characteristics that impact negatively in the development of the city. The third section of the chapter examined the characteristics and evolution of public space in Bogotá.

The fourth part of the chapter focused on the recent governmental initiatives developed since 1995. This section outlined the initiative named ‘Citizens’ culture and addressed specifically the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ in terms of its developments, challenges and impacts in the city. It is clear that these recent initiatives have transformed the structure of the city in terms of urban management, spatial quality and improving of conviviality and sense of belonging among citizens. However, the need to tracking the reach of these initiatives to the local level is one of
the main purposes of the research for this thesis. The assumption that urban quality of life is best explored in the local level is one of the reasons for determining the scope of this research. The fifth section of this chapter was a brief review of the citizens’ perspectives documented in the reports of ‘Bogotá how are we going’, which aimed to evaluate government initiatives.

The last section of the chapter introduced general data about the two parks investigated. It aims to be an introduction to the local world of Villa and Niza parks. The specific spatial practice and urban experience in these two parks are the theme explored in Chapters 5 and 6. The analysis of the spatial practice of each park individually and the further comparison, in Chapter 7, of the most relevant similarities and differences constitute the main purpose of this research. The next chapter explains the research design and all methodological approaches contemplated in this exploratory qualitative research.
Bench in Villa Park, it was used by a smash repairs business located in front of the park.

Chapter 4: Methodology, levels of capturing everyday life in local parks
4.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 identified the main problems of Latin American cities regarding governance, urban landscape and social identity. In that chapter we also discussed how these problems have affected conceptualisation, planning, construction and use of public space. These problems have shaped Latin American cities in unique ways, leading to a number of limitations that negatively affect urban quality of life in the region. Massive population growth, poverty, lack of infrastructure and housing, limited employment opportunities, and deteriorating environments constitute some of the challenges of Latin American cities.

In the field of urban governance, the problems identified centred on the capacity of central institutions to manage national, regional and local development. This capacity has been severely challenged and has been unsuccessful on many occasions (Kelly, 1993). Furthermore, globalisation, regional integration, and dependency on international influences have increased external pressures and internal problems (A. Gilbert, 1993).

In the urban landscape, the tendency to copy the physical image of cities from developed countries has reflected a conflict between the self-image of the Latin American cities and the identity of these landscapes (Hardoy, 1992). Plans have been adapted from overseas but often do not suit the Latin American urban context and are usually incompletely or inappropriately applied (Montezuma, 2001). Furthermore, urban environmental contamination and degradation have advanced rapidly.

As regards social identity, there is a sense of social alienation, as well as a lack of consolidation within communities, and distrust of institutions (Mejia, 1992; Ward, 1990a). Economic and spatial segregation of the urban population has a great impact
on social identity because it is associated with the construction of physical boundaries in the urban landscape, isolation of communities, differentiation of classes or social groups, inequality, and injustice (Barbero, 2000).

Chapter 3 presents the distinctive characteristics of Bogotá as a Latin American metropolis. Some characteristics apply to several cities in the region, for example, some patterns of history and urban development. However, this research focuses on Bogotá because of its new approaches to urban governance, its highly marked socioeconomic differences, its potential for improving the urban landscape, and the distinctiveness of its local communities. In particular, the latest municipal government initiatives developed in the city have produced a transformation that allows us to identify change agents and transitions in critical aspects of urban life such as public space, spatial practice, social interactions, urban culture, and lifestyles.

The research questions focus on the evaluation of a new urban management initiative that aimed to solve some of the tensions between public space and communities in the city and improve social interactions between citizens. The research questions are addressed in order to identify spatial practice in public space, people’s perception of public space and the potential of public space for community development, and improvement of the quality of urban life in a local context. This research used Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (REAP) as a methodological framework and as a set of methods for data-gathering. REAP were also enriched by Environment and Behaviour research tools (EB) that contribute to an understanding of the links between the urban environment and communities within an interdisciplinary framework. In this way, public space becomes an active component that affects people and is, in turn, affected by them.

This chapter is divided into two parts, the first of which addresses REAP as a methodological framework appropriate for the context and the nature of this research. The second part illustrates how REAP were adapted in a set of methods that appropriately addressed data-gathering and -analysis for this study. More specifically, the first part presents the research questions, rationale and research design. It focuses on the way REAP contribute to the construction of a methodological framework for multidisciplinary research on urban issues in Latin America. The second part presents
the specific way in which ethnographic methods were designed and used before, during and after fieldwork.

4.2 Methodological framework: Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures.

This research seeks to evaluate a recently implemented municipal government initiative, ‘Parks for Learning How to Live’. This project, as explained in the previous chapter, produced important transformations in public space in Bogotá. It also reflects progressive transformations in public administration of the city. The aim of this study is to respond to the research questions by conducting two case studies in two neighbourhood parks included in the project.

4.2.1. Research problem and questions

Urban research in Latin America has focused on issues of urban governance, urban planning, public space and community development since the 1990s (Valladares & Coelho, 1995). However, these themes have not been connected within an interdisciplinary framework. Planning cannot continue to be independent from processes delegated to public administrators and politicians because the new urban challenges appear as interdisciplinary, complex and urgent for decision-making and solutions. Because planning is intended to contribute to quality of urban life and is people-oriented, planning initiatives need to be participatory and communicative. In other regions, urban studies have been more successful in developing perspectives of social and environmental research for addressing community projects which involve public space (Brown et al., 2003; Coleman, 2001; Taplin et al., 2002). It is necessary to interweave interdisciplinary understandings of urban issues in order to generate a strong theoretical foundation for urban planning in the Latin American region.

The macro-framework for this research is the evaluation of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. The micro-framework is founded in the analysis of spatial practice, urban public life and space production in two distinctive neighbourhood parks in Bogotá. The specific research questions addressed are:
- How do the reciprocal interactions between parks and communities shape spatial practice and urban public life in two neighbourhood parks in Bogotá?

- How does socio-economic status impact upon spatial practice and urban public life in these two neighbourhood parks?

- Has the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ adequately responded to spatial practice in local parks by addressing and fulfilling park users’ needs?

These research questions explore the transformations of neighbourhood parks and local communities in Bogotá since the implementation of the parks project, which began in 1998. In particular, this research investigates the interactions between communities and parks in relation to use and meanings attached to parks. These transformations are the result of changes in governance and public administration in Bogotá. In the past few years, issues of governance and interactions between parks and people have been the main subjects of the urban planning in that city. The researcher conducted case studies of two neighbourhood parks included in the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. This research investigated interrelations between community and public space by identifying issues in the use of parks, community perceptions of parks, and community interactions in neighbourhood parks.

4.2.2. Rationale

Three levels of analysis from the particular or local level to the general or metropolitan level have guided this research. The first level is the analysis of interactions between each park and its community. The second level is the comparison of two parks belonging to different socio-economic areas in a city that is highly segregated by socio-economic status. Low- and high-income groups have very different lifestyles and, by extension, very different recreational and leisure practices. The third level is the analysis of the link between a ‘top-down’ approach to public space and parks (from the public administration) and a ‘bottom-up’ understanding (from the community) about the project, and the consequent urban spatial practices
occurring in parks. Figure 4.1 shows the rationale of analysis starting from the particular (spatial practice in parks) and expanding to the general level (Parks project), indicating how they are parts of the same phenomenon.

Figure 4.1. Levels of analysis

The first level of analysis corresponds to the first research question. This level addresses the issues of spatial practice, urban public life and space production in each park. Aspects of architectural design, natural features, users’ perceptions, meanings, and behaviours in the park are important for this analysis. Local communities develop a set of relationships that contribute to the development of the neighbourhood and the community itself. In neighbourhood parks these relationships are visible and often change through people’s experience of the park. These issues are addressed in the research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of spatial practice and urban public life in each park.

The second level of analysis contrasts the individual analysis of each park in order to identify differences in the way people may experience these two parks. It takes into account that communities in different socioeconomic areas develop their own forms of identification with relation to place and spatial practice. Social and spatial segregation is a significant issue for this research because Bogotá is strongly marked by social and economic differences. Spatial stratification of urban society reflects and reproduces inequality and creates distinct local affinities, identities and, often, tense relationships between different groups and communities, especially when the physical differences between areas are highly visible (Ward, 1990a). In Latin America, wealthy people usually live in the most environmentally attractive areas of the city and the poor in less attractive areas, with fewer amenities, including public space and
parks (A. Gilbert, 1996). In Bogotá, lifestyles also vary depending on the economic capacity of each group and, accordingly, each park becomes a unique case.

The third level of analysis is the relationship between a top-down approach to parks and a bottom-up understanding of parks. Planning aims to control events in time by understanding the past and creating strategies for the future (Montezuma, 2001). Controlling urban events may be more effective if the planning agencies know and understand the nature of phenomena related to public space and social interactions in cities. This research acknowledges that the public administration used a top-down approach when implementing the project of parks. This approach contrasts with the way people perceive the project and the way the project has affected them. The bottom-up understanding from park users was not taken into consideration for the development of the project. In this research this bottom-up understanding is taken into consideration for evaluating some of the outcomes of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ in regards to public space, local communities and spatial practice.

4.2.3. Research design

The complexity of the study called for the development of a research design that seeks to analyse the three levels mentioned above. The two cases studies were analysed following an adaptation of REAP. Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures are a combination of qualitative, ethnographic methods that seek to gather and analyse information about cultural values and meanings in specific time frames. REAP have successfully been used in fields such as health and have recently been adapted to urban studies. The adaptation of REAP to this research includes: document analysis, casual observation, systematic observation including tables and behaviour maps as recording devices, cognitive children’s maps, street interviews and in-depth interviews. This REAP research has been designed, conducted and analysed using Environment and Behaviour research tools to enable the establishment of clear links between public space and users’ perspectives.

This research acknowledges the integrative perspective in which EB research approaches the study of interactions between people and environment. The REAP methodologies conducted have been used in diverse fields of social sciences.
However, the perspective of EB research incorporates the connection between people and space in a direct and specific manner. The observation of place-centred group behaviours in the parks, or the design of interviews that enquire about the perception people attach to the parks, are examples of the use of EB research tools in this methodological approach.

REAP were replicated in each case study for comparison of the interface between communities and spatial practice. The implementation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’, was itself worthy of investigation because of its uniqueness in Latin America, and because of the national and international attention and recognition it has generated. Furthermore, the project created a situation in which neighbourhood parks became distinctive because the project transformed most of the existing city parks generating new uses and new meanings for citizens. Also under this program many neighbourhood parks took on a more formal or institutionally-recognised character than they had previously embodied.

The criteria for selection of the cases focussed on general characteristics: their physical similarities, they are both neighbourhood parks as recorded in the Department of Sports and Recreation; and the fact that they serve a similar population size. Their main difference, which is influential in the selection criteria, is that they are located in two different Strata areas. As explained in Chapter 3, the Strata areas of the city are classified from Strata 1 to Strata 6 (1 corresponds to the lowest income areas and 6 to the highest). The first park selected is located in a Strata 2 neighbourhood, a low-income area; and the second park selected is located in a Strata 5 neighbourhood, a high-income area.

4.2.3.1 Qualitative case study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) in (Byrne-Amstrong, Higgs, & Horsfall, 2001) contemplate some major assumptions about the construction and nature of knowledge that support qualitative research. First, the world consists of multiple constructed realities; these extend in a continuum from deterministic to idealistic. Within that continuum there are several versions of the reality when observed under different perspectives. At the same time human interpretation of these realities varies according to the meanings given to events, situations, or spaces. Public space phenomena have been studied and
analysed across this continuum. This research explores how park users understand public space in terms of how they understand reality and how they construct their reality through spatial practice.

Second, qualitative research seeks to describe and interpret events in order to answer research questions. This research seeks to respond to specific research questions because such an interpretive approach increases the opportunities for finding unexpected answers that enrich the research. Findings can match the researcher’s assumptions but they can also be completely unexpected.

Qualitative research is usually flexible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The possibility of establishing comparisons between two case studies and being able to adapt the methodology to this continuous collection of data allowed the researcher to efficiently grasp the fragments of this reality (spatial practice in public space and its conceptualisation) and tie them together in logical ways. The methods used (REAP) were highly efficient and adaptive because they supplemented each other and at the same time supported each other in terms of data-collection and -analysis with relation to two parks and two periods of time.

Case studies often have a temporal dimension, in that they may show the changes that occur over time (Sommer & Sommer, 2001). This research focuses on the transformation of the two parks before and after the implementation of the project of parks. ‘Parks for learning how to live’ produced a transformation and this research aims to identify the transformations, specifically in terms of spatial practice. In addition, case studies generally have a spatial dimension, in that they are often confined to an organisation, institution, or activity that has definite physical and geographical limits or boundaries (Sommer & Sommer, 2001). In this research this characteristic is primordial since the relationships of the community with space and the role of public space in users’ lives are being investigated. The fieldwork was conducted in two periods [June-August 2002 and December 2003-February 2004]. This allows us to identify the issues that have changed and the issues that have prevailed over time—for example, the changes in parks design and maintenance.
4.2.3.2 Environment and Behaviour research

The research design addresses Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures as a holistic methodological approach structuring this research. Environment and Behaviour research tools are specifically used within the design of each method adapted into REAP. The purpose of using EB research within the specific methods is to address issues of the interactions between park users and the park’s environment and therefore identify spatial practice.

Incorporating human beings and environment in a holistic ecological perspective is a vital approach in terms of sustainability and conservation of the environment and human ecosystems. Additionally, studying social phenomena without a spatial context has become very difficult because the complexity and variety of these views required a multi-disciplinary approach to environmental issues (Arden & Thorne, 1980).

The methods used to gather data in the research are all designed following Environment and Behaviour research perspectives. In that sense we are interested in inquiring about spatial practice; behavioural patterns of the communities involved; and the form in which the urban landscape, in this case the parks, influence the community. By gaining an understanding of the dynamics of spatial practice, urban public life and space production, one may be able to provide tools for the future design, planning and management of urban and social initiatives that greatly affect people.

4.2.4. Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (REAP)

REAP are an applied research methodology employed to gather cultural information, significant cultural values, meanings, and other community and local concerns. Its main purpose is to produce knowledge in a rapid time frame to respond to project scheduling commitments (Pearson & Kessler, 2000; Taplin et al., 2002). It is also a holistic methodology that aims to organise data at both macro- and micro-levels into one. Thus, its purpose is to identify, analyse and interconnect general structures, particular beliefs, perceptions and behaviours that are characteristic of specific phenomena (Pearson & Kessler, 2000). Investigating the phenomena of public space
Ndolamb (1992) argues that the concept of REAP extends in a continuum of two endpoints: the operational being a set of methods and the theoretical being an approach to understanding cultural values in community-based phenomena. This research embraces the two approaches. REAP as a framework provided theoretical and methodological tools for interweaving cultural values; and enabling a comparison between several issues concerning spatial practice in parks. Additionally REAP provided the opportunity for approaching the phenomenon from different perspectives and different levels of analysis. Methodologically, REAP contributed to ensuring reliability and validity because the combination and contrast of data gathered from the methods used were triangulated.

REAP have been mostly applied in health; in this field REAP were pioneered in research in developing nations and especially in rural settings. This methodology originated in the fields of agriculture and public health in the developing world in the early 1980s (Manderson & Aaby, 1992). Since then REAP have been widely used internationally in both developed and developing countries by agencies such as UNICEF, The World Health Organisation, the US National Park Service, and by local agencies from different cities and regions.

Despite its recognition and use in the health sciences, this methodology has recently been applied in research on urban parks in USA. Two examples are: a study conducted by Taplin et al. (2002) of Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, USA; and a study of the Civil War and Anacostia Park, District of Columbia, for Park Management Plans (Williams & Ramos, 1997). Taplin and her colleagues used a combination of different methods appropriate to their project and achieved significant findings related to cultural values. Among their methods were extensive interviews (key informant interviews, street interviews), focus groups and behaviour maps. Furthermore, they interrelated them in a triangulation framework to build reliability. The second research was able to identify community perspectives in relation to Civil War and Anacostia Park that the National Park Service had not been
aware of and, for that reason, this example contributed to future Parks Management in Washington and the USA (Williams & Ramos, 1997).

Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures have a number of characteristics that are appropriate to the themes of this research. First, operational advantages are the rapid time frame for the research and the possibility of combining different methods under one holistic perspective and, in that way, being able to intersect data and findings (Taplin et al., 2002; Williams & Ramos, 1997). In operational terms this research is not the same as common REAP research because REAP are usually conducted by teams and are usually answerable to a government or an international agency.

This research was conducted by a sole researcher rather than by a research team (as is most REAP research). This imposed practical limits on the extent to which concrete forms of community stakeholder involvement could be developed. On the other hand, the REAP research for this thesis was not reliant upon any contractual relationship with a government agency and for that reason did not have to respond to biased political or management issues as other REAP projects usually do (Pearson & Kessler, 2000). In addition, the research design and sample selection was conducted from a distance prior to going into the field. Therefore, even if there had been a framework in place for organising or representing stakeholders as part of the parks project, it would have been difficult to negotiate and structure their involvement in this thesis project.

Second, REAP research is action-oriented and may contribute to improving public programs, to problem-solving and decision-making, and can also serve as an evaluative tool for programs that have already been executed. The research for this thesis describes, analyses, and evaluates a project already under way, rather than researching a project from its initial stages, as in the cases of Independence National Historical Park, and Civil War and Anacostia Park. The researcher did conduct extensive documentary research on the parks project, but fieldwork was conducted well after the commencement of the project. Therefore, while some of the processes and actions associated with the implementation of the parks project could not be captured ethnographically, extensive documentary research was able to identify issues that occurred during the creation and implementation of the project. While not
conducting ethnographic fieldwork continuously over a long period, doing so on two occasions, and after the parks project had already begun, allowed the research to identify and analyse uses of, and community perspectives on, the parks and to evaluate the parks project. Since REAP have often been used as a tool for preliminary research in development programs, this research presents an innovation in using REAP for evaluative purposes after the program’s implementation and independently from the program.

Thirdly, REAP are process-oriented in the sense that they investigate the historical background of the problem studied, the present situation and seek guidance for future development (Pearson & Kessler, 2000). REAP often involve local people as part of the research team. This involvement encourages local participation and conflict resolution, and provides a better environment for diminishing the potential negative social impacts of new initiatives (Ndolamb, 1992). The specific version of REAP applied to this study does not engage this level of participation for two reasons. First, as mentioned, the research was conducted by a single researcher. Second, these REAP aim to evaluate an initiative already in train rather than from the beginning. However, the research on parks in Bogotá has potential for participation and community empowerment because it provides a framework for understanding cultural and social values for future urban planning. It also provides the methodological strategy as a useful resource for future research in park planning.

Unlike the context for most other REAP research, while stakeholders are easily identified, the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project did not include a framework by which diverse stakeholders were brought together in advisory or management councils, communities or reference groups. Therefore, the researcher’s construction of such a framework would have been arbitrary, selective and not part of the actual process of the parks project. Indeed, one of the objectives of the research was to evaluate the limits or impacts on the success of the parks project arising from the relatively weak mechanisms and frameworks for formal participation. This research does accord with REAP in that there was a continuous gathering of data for document analysis and comparison between macro-level data (the parks project) and micro-level data (the neighbourhood parks) collected during fieldwork. In doing so the research
seeks to gain a greater understanding of local phenomena that affect people in their everyday life.

A gap between method and theory can be identified in REAP, in that sometimes the focus on the set of tools for practitioners excludes a focus on theoretical issues (Ndolamb, 1992). However REAP can be applied for theory-building purposes as well as for empirical purposes because it is a rich way of gathering data. Moreover, the fact that it is conducted over a relatively short period of time facilitates the production of results that can contribute to theory-building. One barrier to this is that sometimes the need to use the findings for rapid decision-making excludes the identification of important theoretical findings but it does not mean that REAP are not appropriate for identifying important theoretical findings.

REAP are a set of methods that attempt to compress ethnographic research in a short period of time. The time spent during fieldwork in REAP is significantly reduced in comparison to classical urban ethnography in the USA (Whyte, 1955) as well as in Latin America (S. Low, 2000). Some of its potentials are that REAP encourage policy outcomes. REAP are intensively applied methods; the time limitation generally encourages efficiency with data gathering. REAP can be applied by a team of researchers or by a single researcher. A potential limitation of REAP can be that it is often customer based and in that way it may bias the findings and conclusions. However, in the case of this thesis, the researcher had no affiliation with any organisation and for that reason client bias did not occur.

REAP is a flexible mixed method approach that in some instances incorporates action research. Incorporating action research into REAP may strengthen the information gathered and the outcomes. Action research has been applied with different levels of success in similar research designs (Byrne-Amstrong et al., 2001; Creswell, 1994; Fals Borda, 1999, 2000). However, this specific research did not aim to use action research because the researcher wanted to explore the other potentials of REAP without expanding its scope to levels that would be difficult to manage by a single researcher. Furthermore, this research study is independent and neither the community nor the municipal administration were involved in the formulation of research directions. The research specifically addresses local communities’ perceptions and
discusses issues related to community participation but it was not conceived as an action research methodological design.

4.3 REAP: the methods in practice

The two case studies constituting this research allow us to understand dynamics of spatial practice, urban public life and space production as well as to evaluate the extent to which the objectives of the parks project were being realised. This also allows us to identify and analyse the commonalities and differences between the two communities from different socio-economic backgrounds studied.

Within Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures, a number of research techniques have been employed at different stages of the research, the most important stage being the fieldwork. The selection of the methods corresponds to the strategy for inquiry presented above based on qualitative research and framed by REAP (Altman & Low, 1992; Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Setha M. Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Sanjek, 2000; Sommer & Sommer, 2001; Taplin et al., 2002; Wolcott, 1995; Zeisel, 1984). The specific methods are: document analysis, casual observations, systematic observation and behavioural maps as part of systematic observations, children’s cognitive maps, street interviews and in-depth interviews. Some of the methods have also been used concurrently. For example, document analysis was used prior to going into the field, but was used again with the gathering of additional documents while in Bogotá, and also after fieldwork was completed.

Fieldwork was undertaken in two phases, the first in July-August 2002 and the second in December 2003 - February 2004. The two phases of fieldwork followed the same procedures and the methods were replicated in both parks. Both phases of fieldwork correspond to the national school holidays and beginning of school terms. The weather conditions varied slightly in these two phases, July – August being marginally cooler than December to February. Because Bogotá has only minor seasonal changes, the temperature is similar all year round and the only weather condition that affects the use of parks is rain. Comparisons of the frequency of use of the parks therefore relate more to the school terms and holidays rather than environmental conditions such as summer or winter.
The only difference is that, in the second phase of fieldwork, the techniques were refined according to the fieldwork experience from the first phase. For example, some of the questions from street interviews were rephrased or expanded in order to clarify ideas regarding the use of parks and the way users relate to the parks. These changes were minor; therefore, the parameters for comparing both parks and both phases of fieldwork and tracking possible changes over the two periods were maintained.

More specifically, the data gathered in the first phase of fieldwork (2002) included 169 observation records for Villa and 74 for Niza, spending similar amount of time in each park. There were 7 behaviour maps generated for each park; these maps were analysed within the observations. There were 10 cognitive maps made by the children from Villa and 5 made by the children from Niza. There were 25 street interviews conducted in each park and there were four in-depth interviews in total.

In the second phase of fieldwork (2003-2004) there were 145 observation records for Villa and 88 observation records for Niza. The behavioural maps were an update of the previous ones, 7 per park. There were 10 cognitive maps made by children in each park. Street interviews included 25 in Villa and 20 in Niza. There were four in-depth interviews in total, different from the in-depth interviews in the first phase. This amount of data gathered produced a robust foundation for the interpretative analysis presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Villa Park</th>
<th>Niza Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Phase</td>
<td>Second Phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Records</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural Maps</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Maps</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Interviews</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Depth Interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1. Account of methods

4.3.1. Document analysis.

Document analysis is valuable during all stages of research, especially for studying graphic information (plans, pictures, charts and maps) and written data (transcripts of
speeches, legislation and media releases). The main objective of document analysis is to identify categories for analysis that correspond to the research questions (Sommer & Sommer, 2001; Zeisel, 1984). For example, some of the categories in this research are related to uses of the parks, people’s perceptions of the parks, and comparisons between the two parks and between park users and park administrators. These categories cover concepts discussed in the literature review, which explain the objectives of the administration in the provision of public space.

This method supported fieldwork because it allowed the researcher to identify specific categories and items to be analysed, such as provision and uses of sports facilities and children’s playgrounds. Prior to going into the field, the researcher collected and conducted document analysis of a range of documents relating to urban parks in Bogotá. The documents analysed in this research are classified into two categories. The first category includes municipal government documents, namely the reports on the performance of the Mayor’s office between 1998 and 2000. It is a compilation whose title is ‘La Bogotá del tercer milenio: Historia de una revolucion urbana’ or ‘The Bogotá of the third millennium: History of an urban revolution’. This document presents a comprehensive view of the mission, vision, objectives and achievements of that administration. This perspective presents a top-down approach to planning of parks in Bogotá. The second category includes non-governmental stakeholders, and is represented by two main documents. The first is an evaluation of the current condition of the city in terms of public space. It is conducted by different groups of stakeholders and published in one of the major newspapers. Its name is ‘Bogotá como vamos’ (2002) or in English ‘Bogotá how we are going’. This document includes evaluation from an expert in planning, and citizens’ perspectives. The other document under this category is named ‘Memorias del tercer foro internacional de usos y sostenibilidad de parques y espacio publico’ (2002) or in English ‘Proceedings of the third international forum on use and sustainability of parks and public space’. This document describes new initiatives for parks and public space in Bogotá and in other countries.

These documents are important for the study because they indicate the purposes and issues that the government took into account for the development of the project on public space. At the same time they present evidence of the changes that occurred over time with the implementation of these plans, and the evaluations made by experts
and by users of public space. The integration of documents that come from these two sources provide us with a top-down perspective integrated with a bottom-up understanding of the phenomenon (Sanjek, 2000). This documentary data enriched the study by showing a local perspective of issues related to parks, public space, planning, and communities. The data revealed the ways in which these plans were consolidated as well as the scholarly and popular perspectives of these changes. This information allowed the researcher to construct the framework or context within which the parks are situated.

The document analysis that was conducted following fieldwork served as a supporting method that complemented the data gathered. The documents gathered after fieldwork are, for the most part, updates from the municipal government and the media about developments or problems resulting from the implementation of the project. They include editorial analysis on the current state of public space and later evaluations or later initiatives related to the parks.

Perhaps most importantly, document analysis allowed the researcher to identify claims for the success of the metropolitan initiative for parks made by various municipal officials, which the fieldwork could then test in the two parks studied. The analysis of the documents collected prior, during and after fieldwork, indicated that the municipal administration considers the parks project to be successful. This project has acquired popularity at an international level. Governments in various other Latin American countries have studied and implemented some of the strategies used in this project. Yet the fieldwork revealed some significant issues, which pose limits to the effectiveness of the project.

4.3.2. Casual and systematic observation.

Two forms of observation were conducted during fieldwork: *casual and systematic observation*. *Casual observation* aimed to familiarise the researcher with the field. *Systematic observation* included specially designed observation tables in order to record the observation notes systematically. Observation is often supported by other methods (Sommer & Sommer, 2001). In this case it was the first method used in the field and it contributed to the design and content of the interviews, because particular
situations or events identified in casual and systematic observation helped in the elaboration of the questionnaire for the street interviews. Behavioural maps are also based solely on observation; they are another form of representation of the observation notes.

Observation is a source of images; it is often easy to use and deals with long lasting phenomena (Zeisel, 1984). Conducting this method requires a design of measurement instruments such as categories, checklists, coding system and questions to be answered (Sommer & Sommer, 2001). In this research, systematic observation tables are organised around activities, where they took place and people’s behaviour during these activities. The activity is the structuring entry in the table. For example, playing basketball is recorded, then the field or area where this activity takes place and then the characteristics of the people playing and their behaviour. Other information such as weather conditions, date and time are also recorded to provide more detail of the activities observed and establish associations between these features.

Casual observation was conducted over two days in each park at the beginning of both phases of fieldwork. The process included going to the selected parks at similar times (weekends/weekdays, morning/afternoon) in order to identify issues of the park’s design and use. Photographs, as shown in Figure 2, were used as a recording device for capturing the general features of the parks without focussing on people who, although they were aware of the camera, were not intruded upon and remained anonymous. They were taken during casual observation as a graphic source of information for the research. Casual observation helped to identify physical characteristics of the parks and the communities studied. The detailed study of these elements was subsequently developed with the other methods used in combination with casual observation. Figure 4.2, a photograph of the basketball court, provides an example of the outcomes derived from casual observation. The activity is circumstantial but provides a vivid image for spatial practice in the park. Activities were observed in detail and recorded in the tables using systematic observation.
The next method used during fieldwork was *systematic observation*, which was conducted in the two parks during similar times in terms of days and hours. The first task using systematic observation was to define a timetable for visiting the parks. Table 4.2 shows a timetable designed on a weekly basis. Blank boxes mean that there was no observation conducted during these periods. The timetable was applied in the same ways in the two stages of the fieldwork.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morning</strong></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Afternoon</strong></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evening</strong></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Morning observation periods were from 7 am to 1 pm; afternoon from 1 pm to 6 pm; and evening from 6 pm to 10 pm. The time from 10 pm to 7 am was not covered in the research for two reasons. First, this period is not particularly active in terms of park use. Second, it is an inconvenient time for a single researcher. Morning and afternoon were separated by the common lunchtime in Bogotá (around 1pm) and afternoon and evening by sunset time (around 6pm). There were four nights not covered by systematic observation because of the difficulty of conducting night observations. Additionally, the three nights covered showed similar patterns of lower use. This timetable was conducted over a period of one month and a half during each phase of the fieldwork in order to cover all the times specified in both parks. This timetable was replicated during the two phases of research. Therefore the frequency of visits to the parks was similar in both phases. The length of stay during each visit to the parks was an average of one hour and a half. Variations were small, the shortest
visit was one hour and the longest was three hours. These variations depended on the number of activities to record. Appendices 3 and 4 document details of the visits to each park in each phase of fieldwork.

Physical traces and elements of environmental behaviour, such as *by-products of use, adaptations for use, actor, action, context*, constitute the main criteria of collection of data through observation for this specific research. These elements of EB research extend and systematise the ethnographic method by enriching it with a place-centred perspective for analysing users’ observable recreational patterns. Systematic observation tables were designed following these criteria (see Table 4.3 and 4.4). These tables were designed to take into account the different categories discussed below and to adapt them to this specific research (Zeisel, 1984). These tables were designed for systematic observation records. However, the data presented in the tables is raw data complemented by the other methodologies for analysis findings and conclusions.

Table 4.3. Systematic observation in neighbourhood parks: first Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villa Gladys and Niza Parks</th>
<th>Observation table #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>Number of users:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d-m-y</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hour</td>
<td>Age group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 Systematic observation in neighbourhood parks: second Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park:</th>
<th>Table #</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Crowdedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The tables are organised around activities in order to investigate issues on spatial practice. The information recorded included: details about time and weather conditions; information about people involved in the activity such as age group and gender; description of the activity; and description of the specific setting and the behaviour of the participants during the observation.

The table format from the second phase of fieldwork is an improved version of the first one. While maintaining the same structure, it includes more fields, which facilitate the recording of the information and record raw data in a more organised way. For instance, the table for the first phase lacks a box to show an average of park users at certain times. The researcher identified this issue as influential in the analysis and for that reason recorded this data in the first phase and incorporated a box named *crowdedness* in the table for the second phase.

*Systematic observation* can produce valuable insights at the beginning of the project (Zeisel, 1984). It contributes to shaping a comprehensive image of the place, the community, and the relationships between place and community. For example, systematic observation helps to identify frequencies of park use, preferred activities, and special events. These elements provide understanding of the value given to the parks by their users. In this specific case, systematic observation was conducted in order to observe in more detail physical characteristics of the parks, as well as collective forms of behaviour and spatial practice in the parks.
4.3.2.1 Observation within Environment and Behaviour

The following strategies were used to conduct systematic observation in the field and applied to generate the data records from the systematic observation tables (see Appendices 3 and 4) as well as in the behavioural maps made during systematic observation. At an earlier stage of the research it was intended that behavioural mapping would be used as an independent method for gathering and analysis of data. However, these maps became more instrumental at the data analysis stage when combined with the systematic observation tables.

*Observing Physical Traces* means systematically looking at physical surroundings to find reflections of previous activity not presented during the researcher’s observations (Zeisel, 1984). Traces reflect the conscious and unconscious impact of users upon the environment and provide clues about spatial practice. The types of physical traces observed in the parks are outlined in Table 4.5. These include a series of features that reflect previous or ongoing activities produced where the research is taking place. According to Zeisel (1984), they can be classified into four groups: *by-products of use, adaptations for use, displays of self, and public messages.*

Table 4.5. Physical traces to look for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By-products of Use</th>
<th>Erosion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leftovers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing traces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptation for Use</th>
<th>Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Displays of Self</th>
<th>Personalisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group membership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Messages</th>
<th>Official</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unofficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illegitimate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Physical traces: By-products of use* refers to marks left by people on the basis of the continuous use of the park (Zeisel, 1984). The most common mark is the path made on the lawn by continual pedestrian traffic. This trace can be an indicator of the need
for a pedestrian path or redesigning of the lawn. Such traces are categorised as *erosions, leftovers or missing traces* according to the way they were generated. For instance, the previous example is an erosion, a leftover could be a ball left in the sports court that shows people played there before. *Adaptive traces* are direct attempts at design by users. For instance *props* are elements that have been added to a physical setting to create opportunities for new activities, such as play equipment added to a lot to adapt it for use as a playground. *Separations and connections* are also elements added to the space for functional purposes, related particularly to openness and privacy.

*Displays of self* are physical elements that represent affiliation or identification of people with the space. For instance, when a person places a religious image in their front yard they are expressing some of their cultural background and personalising their place or domain. *Public messages* can be government or community notices placed in a public space. An example of this category would be the informative signs giving instructions for the maintenance of the park. *Public messages* can also represent feelings of people expressed unofficially, such as graffiti. Official (or unofficial) public messages are a means of communication between government and community, and between people within the community; they also provide evidence of the exercise of individuality. These traces help to identify features related to the sense of ownership or alienation in parks and public space. Physical traces are important elements for observation in this research because, by acknowledging them, the researcher identifies linkages between park users and physical characteristics of the park.

Observing *environmental behaviour* is a very wide, open and complex activity. In order to facilitate this type of observation, Zeisel (1984) established a number of categories that address and simplify this type of observation. These categories are presented in Table 4.6

Table 4.6. Elements in Environmental Behaviour observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is?</th>
<th>Actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing what?</td>
<td>Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With whom?</td>
<td>Significant others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In *activity-centred observation*, the *actor* is the individual or group that engages in the activity. Their characteristics include age, group and gender. Observing the actors includes paying attention to elements such as dress codes (uniforms, casual wear, etc), particular devices (wheelchair, bicycles, etc) in order to identify the type of person or group developing the activity. These particular characteristics allow us to analyse issues such as park accessibility and characteristics of user groups. For example, these characteristics show if parks are accessible to people with disabilities. The next category in Table 4.6 is the *act* or *action*; it is based on the activities developed in the park, for example, passive recreation, sports and social gatherings.

*Significant others* are people who interact in the activities observed. They differ from the actor in terms of the degree of their involvement in the activity. For example, the players of a soccer game are the *actor* and the spectators are the *significant others*. These are important in environmental design research because they can influence decisions about connections and separations in physical settings and have side effects for relationships (Zeisel, 1984). For example, if park users enjoy watching games from the sports court, it is likely that the design of the court needs to include some benches or spectator area. Position and status are important issues in defining *significant others*. For instance, observation of children in the playground and the position of parents supervising the activity or participating in games defines them as *significant others* or *actors* and defines the active or passive interactions between children and parents in parks.

*Relationships* are often indicative of the success or lack of success of parks in accommodating and encouraging spatial practice. These relationships also have different levels of detail depending on the requirements of the research, and help to develop broader strategies for design. For example, the way in which elderly people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In what relationships?</th>
<th>Relationships: aural, visual, tactile, olfactory, symbolic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what context?</td>
<td>Socio-cultural context: situation, culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
<td>Physical settings: props, spatial relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Zeisel, 1984)
interact, and the areas they choose as being the more tranquil and comfortable, suggest where benches may be placed.

The context explains how a situation could have different meanings in different cultures. Thus, in order to understand the significance of an action for a specific group of people or a specific setting, the context must outline the cultural and social background of the research. In this research the broad context is Latin American cities and more specifically the context is public space and citizens in Bogotá, and the socio-economic differences among neighbourhoods.

Settings offer a potential for use and for that reason they are critical in describing environmental behaviour. Examples of settings include barriers, walks, screens and other elements that influence the use of that space in different ways. Fields, sizes, shapes and orientation of the spaces are also characteristics influencing and conditioning human behaviour and, therefore, are worth including in the observation. In this research, the settings studied were affected by congested roads, residential areas and the removal of trees. For example, the road next to one of the parks generated the construction of a separation fence around the park.

4.3.2.2 Behavioural mapping as part of systematic observation

The method of mapping supplemented the systematic observation tables. It is mainly based on the characteristics of the physical environment and activities that could be located geographically in the park to aid the records from systematic observation tables. At the beginning of the research design this method was formulated as an independent method of REAP. However, during the analysis of data the maps became more useful as a complement to systematic observation. Mapping describes the elements that can be explained graphically (Sommer & Sommer, 2001). For this research, mapping was a suitable methodology because it provided an approximation of issues that are better understood in images rather than words. Mapping helped to identify patterns and characteristics of the place and allowed the researcher to locate and categorise uses of the parks, and relationships between park design and public use.
Behvaioural maps are, maps that researchers sketch which enable them to use a broader, more objective and focussed perspective. Generally, they are classified into two categories according to the aim or central topic of the map. Individual-centred maps focus on the individual who is developing an activity; they follow and show particular individuals across time and location (Sommer & Sommer, 2001). Place-centred maps focus on the space where the activities take place and how the space affects users. Place-centred maps are the ones used in this research because they aim to identify physical and other connections between parks and users.

Place-centred maps were suitable for this research because of the in-depth investigation of the park environment. They are recording devices resulting from the observation stage but, in contrast with the systematic observation tables, these maps show the characteristics that need to be located in this space. In contrast to systematic observation tables, the aim of which was to describe people’s behaviour on site, place-centred maps included analysis from the researcher in the identification of themes related to spatial practice. The characteristics observed in these place-centred maps included: the flow of people in the parks; the illumination at night; location of activities; pedestrian and vehicular movement; external impacts; and specialisation of areas depending on activities and equipment.

Flow of people means the frequency and quantity of users of parks for both short stay (or simply traversing) and long stay. Illumination at night was an important measure of accessibility to some areas of the parks at night and of identifying issues of security, since dark areas are more likely to be the places where delinquent activities occur. Location of activities highlighted issues such as housing, commerce, and transport around the park and how they affect the parks. Pedestrian and vehicular movements identified the busiest and slowest areas as the frequency of people commuting on foot or by vehicle was monitored. Another issue recorded in the maps is the differentiation of zones in the park and the facilities that each park contains, such as benches, playgrounds, and trees. The analysis of these maps was complementary to the other methods used under the approach of Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures.
The format of behavioural maps included fields such as title, name of the park and address, conventions, map and comments. These maps are based on the official plans of the city, which include the configurations of public and private space (see Figure 4.3).

![Figure 4.3. Official map of Niza Park (base for map)](image)

### 4.3.3 Cognitive Mapping

*Cognitive maps* are mental representations of places (Sommer & Sommer, 2001); their importance is based on their subjective nature as they reflect a personal view of a place and highlight the elements of the space that are important for a park user. This methodology was conducted with children participants for a number of reasons. First, they seem more comfortable with expressing ideas in drawings rather than taking part in an interview. Second, research on methods has increasingly welcomed graphic methods into ethnographic and action research with children participant. Third, this method is unobtrusive and children see it as a part of the entertainment they experience in the parks.

*Cognitive maps* were used in the fieldwork as a method suitable for children. Children were unlikely to participate in street interviews because they were engaged in recreational activities. For that reason, information-gathering with children could take the form of a creative and recreational activity that captures their attention for a while.
The way to ensure participation of children in the study was by approaching the playground which is the place in the parks where they normally concentrate. Children were always supervised by their parents or carers. The researcher approached children’s parents or carers and asked if it would be fine for their children to participate in a drawing activity. The researcher identified herself as a research candidate for a doctoral degree and presented a letter from the university explaining the purpose of the fieldwork. Children were then asked if they wanted to participate in a drawing exercise. Subsequently the children who responded positively to the invitation received paper and colour markers. The specific question asked was: Could you please do a drawing of this park? After that the children were doing their drawings either by themselves or while talking with other children engaged in the activity. The researcher approached them from time to time asking the children to describe parts of their drawings. The whole activity took place in the park while the children were supervised by their parents and carers. Cognitive maps looked for children’s impressions of the parks. Including children in the research was important since they are one of the groups that use the parks most frequently and enthusiastically. Children and parks have a vital relationship because parks are usually one of the most important physical settings where children tend to spend their free time and this contributes their development through socialisation and games (Proshansky, Ittelson, & Rivlin, 1976)

It was not possible to supplement the drawings with short interviews with children about the parks, mainly because children prefer to participate in a play activity rather than an interview. However, in some cases children provided short explanations of their drawings. These drawings provide rich insights into a child’s view of the parks. At the same time they give direction for future research on public space as children’s environments. While this methodology may be limited by the lack of an interview that supports each drawing, this shortcoming is solved through triangulation with other methods. Observations and interviews support ideas of how children perceive and experience their parks and contribute to complement the ideas arising in the drawings. The researcher also takes into consideration that over-interpretation of the drawings can become a problem. Therefore, interpretation of drawings is triangulated with rest of the data.
In recent years there has been special interest in investigating the lifestyles of urban children and youth (Ashley & Zorat, 2001). A current urban management concern is to find ways to ensure high quality of urban life to residents, including children and youth. Research on the perceptions and attitudes of children and youth in urban settlements has increased and developed across disciplines. The contributions of two global initiatives have changed the landscape in terms of scholarly research and ways to approach children’s concerns. These two initiatives are UNESCO’s ‘Growing up in Cities’ and UNICEF’s ‘Child friendly cities’ (Ashley & Zorat, 2001; Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Chawla, 2001; Driskell, 2002; Holden & Clough, 1998; Innocenti Research Centre, 2002; Lynch, 1977).

The ‘Growing up in cities’ initiative is part of the UNESCO program for social transformations and started in the 1970’s (Lynch, 1977). It aims to generate participatory efforts for children to be actors in the development of cities worldwide. In Latin America, research on and with children and youth has been undertaken in cities from Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela (Chawla, 2001). Some outcomes of this initiative include: the acknowledgement of the importance of children and youth perspectives on urban lifestyles; the creation of participatory tools and more inclusive
methodologies in research and urban planning addressed to children; attention to the creation of inclusive urban environments that encourage good practices for children and youth; attention to social and cultural contexts regarding children and youth participation; and participation measured in terms of local relevant outcomes (Ashley & Zorat, 2001; Driskell, 2002).

The ‘Child friendly cities’ initiative sponsored by UNICEF emphasises that a child friendly city is committed to fulfilling children’s rights through good governance. The ‘Child friendly cities’ initiative suggests that urban children face exclusion in cities in developed countries as well as in developing countries because of non-inclusive urban development, but with the most vulnerable children being those in poverty (Holden & Clough, 1998; Innocenti Research Centre, 2002). The outcomes of this project include: the encouragement of the participation of children in urban decision making; the generation of legal mechanisms that promote the respect of children’s rights; and the advocacy for children’s rights at different instances of urban management. Bogotá is one of the cities subscribing to this initiative.

In Bogotá, the most important principle of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project (1998-2000) was to create opportunities for inclusion and empowerment of children and young people through public space (Penaloza, 2001). More recently, The Third International Forum of Use and Sustainability of Parks and Public Space, held in Bogota, in 2003, included in its conclusions the key role of participatory and inclusive processes in urban management. These conclusions also reinforced to emphasise that cities must be developed in such ways as to fulfil children and youth’s needs, and that their participation in urban planning is crucial for the creation of more liveable cities (Araujo, 2002; Mockus, 2002).

The increasing involvement of children and youth in urban research and urban planning has reaffirmed that children and youth are important park users and for that reason their perceptions and uses of parks are essential to identify the degree of their quality of urban life. The specific research question of this chapter is: how do the spatial practices of children and youth occur in local parks of Bogotá? Since this question is of a qualitative nature the most appropriate research methodology was an adaptation of Rapid Ethnographic Assessments Procedures (REAP) because the
combination of ethnographic methods contributes to the exploration of the reciprocal relationships of children and youth with their local parks.

4.3.4. Interviews

Asking questions in research means questioning systematically to find out what people think, feel, do or know about a specific situation, and what can not be ascertained through observation alone (Zeisel, 1984). Interviews are a tool for becoming acquainted with particular features of a situation and the personal view of the interviewees. Because of the different perspectives that can arise from an interview, this research has developed a specific guide that focuses on questions that investigate spatial practice, urban public life and space production.

Two types of interviews were conducted in this research: street interviews and in-depth interviews. The characteristics of focussed interviews are that people are known to have been involved in a specific situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For example, in street interviews people were immersed in the physical setting and they were informed that they would be asked about the park. Conducting street interviews in the park is advantageous for gathering rich information because people can remember their experiences of the park. The interview design acknowledges that the interview is conducted in the park and gathers both structured and semi-structured answers.

Street interviews were conducted in the parks and asked park users about their habits and perceptions in relation to the park. During the first phase of fieldwork 50 street interviews were conducted; 25 in each park. During the second phase 45 street interviews were conducted; 25 in Villa park and 20 in Niza park. In-depth interviews were addressed to key stakeholders in order to elicit information about the history of the parks, administrative processes, lifestyles, and consolidation of the parks at different administrative and community levels. There were 4 in-depth interviews conducted during each of the two phases of fieldwork.

The street interview guide included four parts (see Table 4.7): demographics; uses of the park; users’ perception and their social relationships in the park; and changes that
users have perceived in the park. The first part identified characteristics of the interviewees. The second part identified frequency of use and type of activity carried out in the park. The third part investigated the interviewees’ perceptions of the park and their knowledge of park users. The fourth part elicited information about the changes observed by the interviewees and their expectations for the future.

The interviews were conducted in the parks, face to face. They lasted from 15 to 30 minutes. There were twenty-five street interviews per park in each phase of the fieldwork, for a total of 100 interviews in the two parks in the two phases of fieldwork. (See appendix for the Interview models)

Table 4.7. Street interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Describe yourself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender: Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group: 12-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you live in this neighbourhood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long does it take to come to the park?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Use of parks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you usually come to the park?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long do you usually stay here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What days and at what time do you prefer to come?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which activities do you practice here? Could you list them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which activities are you not able to practice in the park?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do you usually come with?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you meet people in the park?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you made friends in the park?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had meetings in the park with friends, neighbours or groups? Who with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you aware of any group in the neighbourhood that meets in the park? Do you belong to any of those groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that the park satisfies your needs and/or fulfils your expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who does the park belong to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the park maintained by?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel any sense of belonging to this park?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you try to take care of the park in any way? Can you mention how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any neighbourhood or community activity in this park? Could you mention them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you participated in any of these activities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Changes

Are you aware of the parks project being carried out by the Bogotá city council?
Have you noticed any construction or improvement in this park?
Can you describe what the park was like before that construction? or
Do you remember what the park was like some years ago, before 1998?
What do you expect from the park in the future?
What would you like to add to this park?
Has the municipal government or any parks authorities informed the neighbourhood of the project?
Has the neighbourhood, or have neighbourhood organizations, been involved in any planning or decision-making concerning the park?

The in-depth interviews investigated detailed issues relating to public space in Bogotá and public expectations of the municipal administration. They expanded knowledge on some issues raised from street interviews. This methodology was the last one conducted in the field. The interview guide for these in-depth interviews was broadly defined and some of the questions arose from the other methods conducted earlier in the research.

Four in-depth interviews were conducted during the first phase of fieldwork and four more interviews in the second phase for a total of eight in-depth interviews (see Table 4.8). They investigated in detail the main features of the parks project and were conducted with identified stakeholders (from municipal officers to neighbourhood representatives). These were unstructured interviews, conducted at the offices of the stakeholders or in the parks, and lasted from 30 minutes to one hour each. The researcher used purposive sampling to select interviewees.

Table 4.8. In-depth interviews–general guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of analysis, design and construction of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the main features of the project, e.g. obstacles, interaction with the community, improvements, milestones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the design respond to people’s needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contribution and experience. (Architect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priorities of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have these priorities changed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the priorities been met?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, in-depth interviews were supplemented by archival data that stakeholders provided during the interview. The Park’s Division representative provided a CD with pictures of projects developed around the city and also plans of parks and the laws that govern the building of parks. The Architect provided a CD with images depicting some design projects in different parks. The local representative of Villa Park provided pictures showing the history and construction of the park and the neighbourhood before the parks project. Finally, the local representative of Niza Park included in her interview a transect walk around the park and other nearby parks in order to point out some of the changes and features.

During the second phase of fieldwork the interviews with neighbourhood representatives was more a follow-up or update of the current state of the parks. In this second phase two new in-depth interviews were conducted with a police officer in charge of security for the park and a private security guard in charge of the other park. These stakeholders had been identified in the first phase of the fieldwork through
observation, and also from the comments of users who regarded security as one of the main issues.

4.4. Analysing data

REAP enable the establishment of links and relationships between different aspects of the research. The data analysis follows the three levels of analysis explained in the rationale of the research, and aims to answer the research questions. The first part of the analysis corresponds to the dynamics of each park in terms of spatial practice, urban public life and space production. The second part of the analysis focuses on the comparison between the two parks, their conditions, similarities, and differences, taking into account that they belong to different socioeconomic areas of the city. The third part analyses the communication, understanding and contrasting perspectives of users and parks administrators with regard to planning principles; use of parks; provision of services; and success, or otherwise, of the parks project.

Prior to conducting the fieldwork, a number of assumptions were examined in order to generate a conceptualisation of the phenomena supporting the research design and analysis. These assumptions were selected by using the researcher’s knowledge of the context in combination with information from the literature review. During the fieldwork, the constant evaluation and review of those categories, together with the data gathered, generated an analytical association of arguments that contributed towards refining such categories. After the fieldwork, the continuous verification of the data reshaped the final categories for analysis and discussion. An example of these categories is Interactions of people with the park; this category analyses issues of the impact of the physical space on people and the ways in which people are influenced by their environment. It also presents people’s perceptions of their environment. After fieldwork, raw data went through a process of refining by the generation of a matrix, conceptual maps and tables that highlighted issues and established different directions and perspectives for analysis.

Following the fieldwork, interpretive analysis started as a dialogue between data and the researcher’s understanding. The first stages of analysis identified park users’ perceptions from the point of view of each age group (children, teenagers, adults and
the elderly). The subsequent stage identified common themes that were relevant to age groups and then structured the analysis within five themes. The five themes are interactions between people; interactions between people and parks; uses and activities; administrative and socio-political issues; and identity and sense of belonging. After expanding the new information relating to each park, the next step was the comparison of the parks, taking into account the impact of the ways in which people of different socio-economic status experienced the park. The next stage was the analysis of the issues that park users considered either positive or negative from the implementation of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project.

4.5. Limitations of the Methodology

The REAP methodology used in this research helped to ensure reliability because each of the specific methods used supported the others. Each of the methods employed is widely used and well-established in urban research (Derrig, 1997; Kornblun, 1997; Kretzmann, 1996; Smith, 1988; Taplin et al., 2002; Thorne & Arden, 1980; Urban Parks Institute, 1996; Whyte, 1955; Zeisel, 1984). A strategy for ensuring consistency in this research is the fact that the research attempts to compare the top-down perspective with a bottom-up understanding (Sanjek, 2000). The top-down perspective is the vision of the government in regards to the project of parks, provided by government documents, media releases, and speeches. The bottom-up understanding is generated by data-collection and fieldwork in the parks during two periods in 2002 and 2004. This dual perspective is expected to present contrasting ideas that will contribute to consistency in the study.

The time-line of the fieldwork, over two periods of two months, (July-August, 2002 and January-February 2004) limits to some extent the ability to track temporal changes in the cases studied. However, through archival research and interviews, the research captured the temporal dimension by developing a diagnosis of the design, management, uses and meanings of the two parks, before the introduction of the municipal program ‘Parks for learning how to live’ and after its implementation. Therefore, in addition to the short but intensive period of fieldwork, there was an earlier period of document retrieval and analysis (Departamento Administrativo de Medio Ambiente, 2001; El Tiempo, 2002; Fonseca, 2001; Instituto Distrital de
Generalisation is another controversial theme in regard to qualitative research. Peacock stated: ‘…As in good literature, so in good ethnography the message comes not through explicit statement of generalities but as concrete portrayal’ (Wolcott, 1995). This research seeks to keep the balance between generalisations and the specificities of the case study by relying on the comparative nature of the research design. The research compares two parks from different socioeconomic backgrounds; it also compares park users’ perceptions and the government vision of the parks and urban social life. The research also seeks to intersect the different methods conducted in order to capture the issues affecting interactions between parks and community comprehensively; this is achievable by using Rapid Ethnographic Assessment.

Qualitative researchers often tend to maintain a sense of partisanship, which can be said to be a necessary characteristic of the researcher because it provides passion to the study, critical perspective and high interest in solving or contributing to the social phenomena studied. This research evidences this partisanship in regard to the context, the researcher being originally from Bogotá. Some of the urban issues concerning public space in Bogotá were perceived first through the lens of a common citizen and currently through the lens of the researcher. Being a past park user from Bogotá provides me with important personal knowledge that I can bring to the research task. The research design gives me the tools to overcome bias that could remain from this personal experience and the interpretative paradigm contributes to strengthening critical thinking about the issues involved.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the methodologies adopted in conducting the research on two neighbourhood parks in Bogotá, Colombia. The methods used in this research are a result of the synthesis of a number of factors; first, the problems identified concerning urban public space in Latin American cities from three perspectives: governance, urban landscape and social identity; second, the use of REAP as a methodological framework and as a combination of methods; third, the use of
Environment and Behaviour (EB) research tools applied to urban parks for linking people and environment.

The problems identified of public space in Latin America brought a set of research questions that respond to three levels of analysis, going from the micro-level phenomena to the macro-level phenomena. The three levels focus first on the interactions in each park, second on the comparison of park dynamics in different socioeconomic areas of the city, and third on the contrast between the visions of the administration with that of the users. The research design produced innovative research methodologies in the Latin American context and in the public space context. Examples from other research enhanced this study by presenting supportive ideas that contributed to the definition of REAP and document analysis for the methodological strategy. REAP contributed to triangulation, improved the case study and contributed to the definition of guidelines for each method.

The participation of the community, even though limited, was very positive and the experience helped to define a broad field of the study and to specify key issues that were not taken into account in the early design of the methodology. Hence, the fieldwork was part of the research design and the possibility of having two phases of fieldwork was advantageous in this regard. The methodologies and the fieldwork present further possibilities for continuing research on themes relating to public space following the EB research perspective in Latin America (for instance, further research on parks as important environments for children). The methodological strategy contributes to developing scholarly research on public space and provides innovative approaches that facilitate multidisciplinary research in the field.
Chapter 5: Villa Park, dreaming of paradise
5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines spatial practice in Villa Park. Figure 5.1 shows a panoramic view of the park from north to south in order to provide a visual image of the park examined. As discussed in Chapter 2, spatial practice is a concept that contributes to understanding the nature of public space in an integrative manner. This holistic analysis addresses the relationships between different elements of spatial practice in parks, such as social, political, cultural, environmental and economic elements.

- How do the reciprocal interactions between parks and communities shape spatial practice and urban public life in two neighbourhood parks in Bogotá?

This chapter discusses the main characteristics of Villa Park and the different spatial and social interactions that occur in the park. The aim of this question is to understand how spatial practice occurs in this park. By illustrating spatial practice, specifically from park users’ perspectives, the research seeks to contribute to knowledge on urban planning that incorporates a bottom-up understanding of public space in local communities. This park is located in a low-income area of the city and because of that location, it displays particular urban and social characteristics. More specifically this
analysis explains five main themes that come from the analysis of the data as a result of an interpretive analysis (Silverman, 2001).

The data presentation and analysis is organised around age groups. Children, youth, adults and elders are groups that perceive and relate to the park in different ways. It is clear that in both parks, age groups interact together, but for the purposes of this analysis we have identified that each age group’s approaches to the parks and recreation are different. Furthermore, this chapter is divided into five main topics that were generated from the data following interpretive analysis. This type of analysis involves a dialogue between the data and the conjectures of the research and addresses the elements that arise from both that data and the researcher assumptions, in an integrated perspective.

Children participants were from 4 to 12 years old. The method addressed to children for data gathering was cognitive maps. They provided children perspectives about the park in a way of representation that is familiar to them (drawings). Youth are between 13 to 19 years old, they are generally known as teenagers. Adults are from 20 to 64 years old. This is a representative group of users because of the large range of ages of adults and the larger amount of participants in interviews, 38 interviewees. Elders, for the purposes of this research are from 65 years old and older. All age groups are important users of urban parks. Their exchanges in terms of recreation, use of parks, and socialisation are important issues to analyse in order to understand spatial practice, urban public life and space production in these two parks.

The variety of issues explored and their interconnections generated unavoidable overlap of topics in some cases. The interviews provided in-depth insights from park users and stakeholders appropriate for qualitative analysis. These insights were supported by the other methods such as observations, following the methodological approach of Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (REAP). The methods applied had as a principle to gather information about perceptions, experiences and qualitative characteristics of park users and the park.

This chapter discusses five main themes: interactions between people; interactions between people and parks; uses and activities; administrative and socio-political
issues; and identity and sense of belonging. Each section discusses in detail the perspectives of different age groups. Interactions between people refers to the ways people perceive themselves and others in the park, and the way they interrelate to each other. Interactions between people and the environment refers to how people perceive the environment of the park and how those perceptions contribute to shaping behaviours and attitudes of park users. The theme uses and activities, explores the issue of spatial practice by relating activities with users’ behaviours and the specific places of the park where the activities take place. Administrative and socio-political issues refer to the elements that affect spatial practice in the park but are considered resulting from the use of the park or support the use of the park. Identity and sense of belonging refer to beliefs and values that people attach to the park, which come from memories or previous experiences in other places of leisure.

5.2 Interactions between people: The social space of public parks

This section discusses how people perceive others and themselves in the park, taking into account different age groups. It analyses perceptions, experiences and behaviours of groups and the way these groups relate in terms of spatial practice and recreation in the park. Despite the fact that spatial practice is a holistic phenomenon, it is necessary to distinguish the different elements that constitute spatial practice and the interactions between people is one of the identified influencing issues in spatial practice in Villa Park.

5.2.1 Children

Children’s interactions in the park were recorded through children’s drawings and triangulated with observations and other users’ comments about children. Four drawings from 2002 included anonymous characters in the park, specifically other children. Four children did not draw people at all and the other two drew themselves (as confirmed with the authors of these drawings). Drawings from 2004 showed that six children drew anonymous people in the park, two children did not draw people and two drew themselves with another person (as clarified with the authors of these
From the six drawings that pictured various people, only one child drew adults.

From the drawings depicting various people in the park, more specifically other children, we can see that children do not directly link the park with the adult world. These children seem to identify the park as a children’s domain where they feel free from supervision. Except for one drawing, no child made reference to parental supervision, even though observations confirmed that adults were present in the park and there was supervision at all times. One child drew himself in the swing with his father pushing him (as clarified when he gave me his drawing (see Figure 5.2). He also drew other two children playing in the playground. This image may be a representation of the actual time when the drawing was made because at that time the child was playing with his father. Some parents let children play by themselves and they take the role of supervising children. Various parents also play actively with their children but only one drawing recorded this interaction between parents and children.

Figure 5.2. Drawing from a 10-year-old child picturing a father playing with his son.
In two drawings from 2002 children drew themselves engaging in an activity alone. One of them drew herself with great detail; the other child only drew the activity without reference to the space. In 2004 two children drew themselves in the park, one girl draw herself with another girlfriend. In this drawing, the two children pictured are larger compared to the other elements of the drawing (see Figure 5.3). It seems that for this girl her interaction with the other girl is more important than the elements of the park. These drawings showed that for several children perhaps their experiences in the park were more important than the park itself. Some children gave great value to their interactions with other children and at the same time others valued their individual experiences more than their social experiences.

Figure 5.3. A 6-year-old drew herself and girlfriend

All drawings depicted pleasant and enjoyable experiences. Observations revealed that children displayed joy in their games by cheering, laughing joking and playing. Children may see the park as a place for meeting with other kids or a place to observe other children even if they do not interact directly with them. Children were never alone in the park and they had to share the facilities with others. Observations corroborate that the use of this park is very high and children have to share the playground facilities, for example they often have to queue to use the slides. Figure
5.4 shows the crowdedness of one of the playgrounds on a weekend. This figure also shows the wide range of users and activities using the park simultaneously.

![Image of playground use on a weekend]

Figure 5.4. Playground use on a weekend

**5.2.2 Teenagers**

Some teenagers are still quite young, 12 or 13 years old, and they go to the park to play in the playground with the children. Despite the relatively narrow age gap of teenagers, their lifestyles can vary depending on age, life choices and opportunities. Despite their age some of these teenagers have children of their own, others could not finish school and are working or unemployed as several of them stated in interviews. A teenager who is a young mother said:

*I come to play with my son; I am satisfied with the park because it is mainly for my son's entertainment... Children make the park better because one can see their happiness; they are the most important people in the park... I like it [the park] the way it is but I would like it to have more playground facilities.*

Street interviews from both phases of research showed trends of teenagers’ socialisation in the park. Out of nine interviews with teenagers, six stated that they go to the park with relatives and friends and that they have made friends in the park. Youth are especially willing to make friends for practicing sports. From the three
teenagers who stated that they go to the park alone, two noted that they have met people in the park and have made friends with them. Out of nine interviewees, six stated that they have seen sports or cultural groups in the park but many of them do not belong to those groups. It appears that youth prefer informal association to more formal groups. Recreational activities are meant to be generally informal. Teenagers said they prefer that informality. However, observations showed that the sports groups are very well established in this park and that appears to be the result of commitment to the group. Perhaps teenagers think that they are associated more informally than they really are, perhaps they oversee the commitment they put in these groups because they enjoy participating in them. When asked if he meet friends in the park a teenager said:

> Yes, I always see friends and neighbours in the park…there are groups like break dancing and football [soccer]…Football championship is a community activity we all follow…I play football with my team of friends.

Observation records showed that teenagers’ interactions in the park were generally friendly; they were highly active, and focused on sports. At the same time there was laughter and joking in their games. Sports and socialisation are directly linked in this age group. A common behaviour was that youth went to the field with a ball and started playing, sometimes alone; when the court got crowded enough, they started forming groups and played together. When there were male and female youth in the same group, they had opportunities for flirting (see Figure 5.5). People strengthen their confidence and self-esteem mainly at this age, for that reason socialisation in parks is highly important for teenagers (Miller, 1996).
Youth’s perceptions about conviviality in the park are generally positive. However they made qualifying comments regarding conviviality and tolerance. One of them said:

*I have seen fights sometimes when football players have arguments…there are people who look down on others and make prejudices and have fights, it is necessary to be more tolerant…but in general conviviality is good, people participate and talk to each other.*

All interviewees stated that the park belongs to everybody and for that reason people need to share and be respectful towards other users. In terms of social interactions, most teenagers interviewed regarded tolerance, sharing and conviviality as the most important qualities that their community needs to acquire in order to produce a good social environment in the park. These thoughtful comments came from teenagers; therefore, these comments show that their participation and involvement are necessary in the park and the community because they have important points of view to share. Teenagers sometimes criticise adults because they feel that adults do not behave showing tolerance, conviviality and sharing. A teenager said:
There are rules but people do not follow them...I have never seen a fight in the park but people need to share more... it would be nice to have more activities that integrate and reunite families...conviviality is good, though.

Generally, parents worry about the whereabouts of their teenage children. Especially in this community, parents are afraid that their children could join gangs. The park used to be seen as a dangerous place where gangs were engaging in drug and gun related activities, as the neighbourhood representative mentioned. However, since the formal construction of the park and with its increasing use, these activities have decreased significantly. Observation records and interviews showed that even when the gangs use the park, it appears they use it in a tranquil way and mainly to practice sports and meet with people. This park is a space where teenagers can develop socialisation activities, practice sports, associate in groups in a social context and physical environment that is appropriate to them.

Adults often have prejudices or negative attitudes about the way teenagers use the park; some think that teenagers are engaged in antisocial or illegal activities in the park. The observations and interviews with teenagers showed that youth have a very different perception of themselves and the park. The increase of interactions between adults and teenagers in the park could decrease prejudices and end the sense of alienation that many teenagers experience in the community. Some recent activities are encouraging interactions between people of all ages, for example soccer tournaments (see Figure 5.6). However, it is a recent attempt that needs development in order to contribute to strong community bonds. Some studies have emphasised that having little opportunity for participation and involvement facilitates that young people join gangs (Altman & Zube, 1989; Brown et al., 2003; Miller, 1996). Specifically, Miller (1996)(Miller, 1996) noted that one of the main causes of joining them is the search for acceptance, and belonging to a group where they are valued as persons. This park could become a space to improve relationships among age groups and generate a sense of acceptance and a sense of belonging.
5.2.3 Adults

Street interviews with adults were the largest number of interviews in both phases of research, a total of 38 interviews out of 50. The existent demographic data shows that people in Villa tend to live with their extended family in the same house. People tend to have children at very young age, and there are many cases of teenage pregnancies in this area. Unemployment is high and negatively affects the economic situation of this community. Population, as well as the population density is high. For all these reasons the park is a vital part of people’s lives.

The majority of adults using this park noted that they go to the park with their families and extended families. Observations corroborate this information; especially during weekends (see Figure 5.7). As some interviewees mentioned:

*I come with my daughters and with my husband when he has a day off from work…I come here to take care of the girls, meet people, talk to them, and rest…it [the park] is good for the recreation of children.*

*It [the park] is adequate for resting and recreation and it is close to home.*
The park is a place for the recreation of children and our relaxation…it is good to come because nobody tells you off about anything.

Figure 5.7. Extended families visiting the park

Some adults go to the park for grocery shopping and other activities that are not directly related to the park recreational facilities but occur in the same area. The majority of adults appear to link the park with other age groups more than with themselves. They commented that the park is important for children for example, or that the park is a necessary place for elders. Most of them said that they go to the park to take other members of the family. Despite the fact that adults use the park actively, they have the perception that the park is for the leisure of other groups. This idea may result from the perception of some adults that recreation is something unnecessary or a waste of time. This misconception is evident in some adults’ comments, for instance a lady said:

I come here everyday to bring my children and take care of them while they play... my husband comes with us only when he is not working, not very often though.

For the great majority of adults interviewed, the park is a good place to meet with neighbours and friends. Adults are interested in socialising and many make an effort to meet others. Adults, who have lived in the neighbourhood for many years,
expressed that their advances in quality of life have been achieved because of community engagement. Adults also expressed in their interviews that having a united community is important for the survival of the neighbourhood. Figure 5.8 shows the work of the community for improving their neighbourhood.

Younger adults, between 20 to 35 years old and new residents of Villa, find it difficult to integrate to the community. Perhaps because the older adults are organised, it becomes more difficult for younger people or new residents to fit in. They may need to experience the park and the neighbourhood for a longer time before they can strengthen ties with others.

A number of adults stated that they go to the park with their family and other times they go alone. When adults go alone it is mainly to practice sports or because they had some sort of annoyance at home. A few stated that they go to the park to relax and overcome anger or worries. The number of adults using the park for their own sake see the park as a space for relaxing, practicing sports, and healthy entertainment. The trend of adults using the park for their own sake and not the sake of others may be a
demonstration that people are acquiring a greater understanding of the role of the park and the role of recreation in their lives.

The neighbourhood representative noted that some people undervalue the role of the park for the community. For example some people have used the park as a rubbish dump. The representative meant that despite the fact that people have always used parks the main purposes of parks and the ideas of what an urban park stands for are unclear. This lack of clarity is reinforced with the poor communication between municipal government and the community.

Most participants stated that park users need to be more respectful of others and they need to share more. When asked about the behaviours that park users need to improve, a few participants said:

[Users] need to be friendlier, share the facilities with others and don't be selfish.

More respectful, respect people’s private life... be talkative and have dialogues with neighbours.

...more caring with the parks’ facilities... use the available games for limited time so every child has the opportunity to use them, its all about sharing.

Conviviality is a very important issue for this community because they have struggled to build their neighbourhood in its physical dimensions and to maintain good social interactions through the years. Villa neighbours think that tolerance is a very important issue but one that needs to improve. The interview with the police officer in charge of the park and the neighbourhood revealed that the biggest disturbances in the neighbourhood are related to lack of tolerance and violent behaviours. The most common disturbance is domestic violence, he also said:

I haven’t seen any of these disturbances in the park; only in houses in the neighbourhood. We are called when these things happen, and then we go to the houses to stop incidents, sometimes we arrest people and sometimes we investigate and try to mediate in the arguments.
Interviews and observations support this comment; fights or violent encounters are not common in the park. In this sense the park plays an important role in regards to social regulation and social learning, because people go to the park in a positive spirit and they go there to relax, play, and rest, without the worries of their daily lives. Furthermore, observations showed that people enjoy the park; families seem to be caring and loving, other groups are very friendly and they seem to use the park in harmony (see Figure 5.9).

![Figure 5.9. Park on a weekend](image)

The majority of adults interviewed agreed that the park helps them to overcome feelings of stress and anxiety. Some adults said:

*We come here when is sunny... taking sunshine is nice and relaxing because sometimes it gets very cold... children need sun as well so they grow pretty and healthy.*

*I have good fun, especially because of the football... tournaments are well organised... I like to come and watch the tournament games and play myself... there should be more football.*

Other adults stated that they entertain by following the matches from the local soccer championship because they like to see the sport and they like to see their neighbours winning.
5.2.4 Elders

Observations show that there were many elders using this park, as the neighbourhood representative mentioned:

*I like to call this park the park of the elderly...like me (laughs)... because they come here and spend a long time... I like them to come here with their grandchildren, sit down and relax on benches and take sunshine.*

The interviews with elderly people indicate that they are generally willing to interact with other people. Elders go to the park especially with their families. In this neighbourhood, many grandparents are in charge of taking care of the grandchildren while their children go to work. As low-income earners Villa Park users cannot afford child care centres; thus, parents leave their children with their parents or most trusted neighbours during the day.

On the other hand there are some elders that go alone to the park, they mentioned in interviews that they feel lonely at home and they go to see people and the park. A senior park user mentioned:

*I come to the park to walk, take sunshine and try to talk to people... sometimes it is difficult because people in the park don't even say hello, if people are not willing to say hello there is no chance of conversation... that is a problem in Bogotá because in small towns, people always say hello and there is always conversation...I would like to have groups for conversation in the park...*

One of the biggest concerns for the elderly is alienation. They have noticed that in Bogotá alienation is very high, and as elders they are highly affected by it. In some cases the families have left them behind and they have to live alone. Sometimes neighbours take care of them, for that reason this park is very important for the elderly, especially the ones that are lonely. Seniors need the park for socialising and interacting with neighbours because they need to establish networks of friends who can help them when they need it. When elders compare the social interactions from
the rural towns where they come from, with the interactions in Bogotá, they express
disappointment because they cannot have the same levels of socialisation. However,
this park has a number of characteristics similar to rural towns, for instance the
Sunday market (see Figure 5.10).

![Figure 5.10. Sunday Market](image)

For many seniors, the park is the place where they spend most of their daily time.
Generally, they are retired or jobless because of their age, and because of their modest
lifestyle they cannot afford going to many other places. Moreover, there is a lack of
networks or associations for elderly people. Villa Park could become an appropriate
space for elder people to meet and form groups for developing activities together.

### 5.3 Interactions between people and parks:

**Space production as a two way feedback**

This section focuses on the perceptions of people about the physical space of the park
and how the space of the park influences behaviours of people. The park affects users’
behaviours for various reasons. First the park is the spatial context for recreation and
leisure. Second, the space of the park depicts specific natural characteristics that no
other urban space has. Because spatial practice is a holistic phenomenon, the physical
space is a determinant part of the equation. This means that social interactions acquire
added value and meaning through locating them into the context of the park.
Moreover, social interactions occur in the way they do because of being immersed in
such spatial context.
5.3.1 Children

Fourteen children in both phases of fieldwork in Villa drew the playground. In seven drawings the playground was the most important part of the drawing. One drawing only pictured the playground, four drawings included the playground, some grass area and the bicycle path. One drawing included an ice cream vendor. The fact children acknowledged vendors as part of the park may mean that vendors are permanent in the area and children are their main customers. Most children highlighted the playground, even though they know the park has other facilities. In Figure 5.11, the child included the vendor stall, which is encircled. The playground is the most important element of the park for children.

Figure 5.11. Child included elements from and around the playground

Some children separated the spatial configuration of the park with their experiences in the park. These drawings showed how children pictured elements of the park and the way they perceived the park as a whole. Six drawings showed elements of the park without any park users. It may mean that these children emphasise the physical elements that form the park. Two children drew the features of the park with a very good sense of the spatial location and provided some hierarchy of what they noted as more important. Figure 5.12 shows a drawing of the playground compared with its
picture; this comparison shows the high level of accuracy of the drawing. A couple of drawings were exact representations of the scene at the moment they were making the drawing.

In the 2002 fieldwork six children drew a house in the scene; in 2004 one child drew a house in the scene. This may mean that children are used to drawing houses and these drawings would not be an exception. It could also mean that they see the park as a big backyard or extension of their houses because the houses in this neighbourhood do not have patios. It may also mean that children understand the park as a natural space within the urban structure of the city, or that children understand the urban nature of this park. If so, children understand that they live in a city and the countryside may be just a vague landscape for them. Most of these children were born in the city, in contrast with their parents and grandparent’s whose backgrounds are related to the countryside. Two of these drawings, however, may be the typical landscape that children draw because they did not draw any specific element of the park.

In 2004, five children drew grass as a natural element of the park; it differentiates the park from streets or any other public space. One child drew mountains as part of the park’s landscape. The park does not have the presence of mountains but the city has the eastern hills, so even though this is not a representation of the near landscape of the park it is part of the city’s landscape. Three children drew clearly defined grass areas and a few trees and flowers, the park does not have established vegetation, and trees are young and not yet tall, these drawings were accurate.
Drawings from 2004 included much more detail than those from 2002. One child drew the soccer/basketball field, he drew the streets surrounding the park and interestingly it pictures the police trailer, this is the only time that a child acknowledged the presence of the police in the park (see Figure 5.13). Some drawings included buses, bicycles and cars. This level of detail in drawings may represent that children have used the park to the extent that they have a clear image of its physical characteristics. This clear image has been developed over an extended time of use. The drawings from 2002 fieldwork did not show that level of detail and clarity. It may mean that the use of the park makes children more aware of the physical elements of the park and perhaps more attached to it.

![Figure 5.13. An 11-year-old drew the police mobile station.](image)

The importance of open public space for children in cities has been largely documented (Altman & Zube, 1989; Araujo, 2002; Cadavid, 1993; Instituto Distrital de Recreacion y Deporte, 2001). In the case of Villa Park, this interaction of children with the park is important because the standard of urban and environmental quality of the neighbourhood is low. Density is high and Villa residents count on little public space and almost inexistent private open space. In this neighbourhood it was observed that the park is a vital element for their everyday life. Interviews and observation
records evidence that this is one of the few, if not the only, option that these parents and children have for outdoor recreation and entertainment.

As the police officer mentioned, domestic violence is the most common disturbance in the neighbourhood. Because of this issue, the park becomes a place where families could become more relaxed and interact together, and in that way decrease this type of problems. Observations confirm that in this park, families and children look happy, in friendly and loving relationships. Having adequate public space in low-income neighbourhoods brings benefits to their users and may influence in improving people’s behaviours.

In terms of the temporal, climatic elements, in both phases of fieldwork 17 children drew the sun and or clouds; it demonstrates that children recognise the park in daytime. They also recognised the climate of the city, since Bogotá is often cloudy. One girl drew day and night symbols together; one on each end of the paper, separated by a big cloud. It was the only drawing showing night features, probably this child has a memory of the park at night, however, observations showed that children tend to leave the park at sunset (see Figure 5.14). Temporal elements (sun, clouds, and moon) are elements that children often draw regardless the aim of the drawing. So they may or may not be of particular importance in this specific case.
Observations from both phases of fieldwork showed that the weather is comfortable for park use all year long. In August 2002 temperatures varied from 11º to 22º C, being sunny but windy much of the time. In February 2004 the temperatures varied from 12º to 25º C. The winds from August are very common every year and this condition generated the tradition of flying kites during this month. Therefore, weather conditions can facilitate the creation of long lasting activities and cultural traditions. Observations recorded that in weekdays; if it started to rain most people would leave the park. However, on the weekend, light rain would not stop people from using the park.

5.3.2 Teenagers

The neighbourhood representative commented that teenagers from this low-income neighbourhood used to join gangs because they did not have facilities for healthy recreation, since the park was only vacant land. In 1985 a sports court was built, but the existing gangs of the time completely vandalised the facilities provided (see Figure 5.15).
The neighbourhood representative mentioned that the area of the park, when it was no more than vacant land, facilitated delinquency because gangs used to hide drugs and weapons in this area. In 1990 the city administration provided funds to built two more sports courts and neighbours worked together to build them. The representative met with these youth from the gangs and they agreed that the new courts would not be vandalised. The agreement has been working since then. This achievement was surprising for the community because they were sceptical of positive actions from gangs. However, it is important to realise that the provision of adequate space for the recreation of youth has changed their behaviour in positive ways. As the neighbourhood representative said:

*The teenagers from gangs were a big problem and police used to take them when they were causing trouble, then they were washed up with cold water and had to stay in the police station overnight, the next day they were free in the streets causing problems again ... some neighbours wanted to attack them with violence but they had to acknowledge that these kids are our neighbours’ children...I thought we should talk and come to an agreement because youth are important people in our community.*
This process described by the neighbourhood representative showed how important the park is for this neighbourhood. Through negotiation they could achieve an agreement that has been respected since the gangs got a space for recreation. The community never thought that a park would generate such a positive change. As the representative stated many of them would have preferred to have more schools or other services instead of a park. However, this event showed that the park generated a significant transformation in the behaviour of the groups of teenagers that were causing problems. This does not mean that there is no delinquent activity, but they are not causing vandalism anymore in this public space. Observations show that youth, including the ones from gangs, use the park especially at night. They use the park without causing problems. However, other people tend to avoid the area of the park when these groups are in the park. Sometimes they are blamed of robbery and delinquency.

The construction of the park provided a space that teenagers can use in their free time. This transformation produced positive impacts on teenagers, giving them the opportunity to join sports groups, make friends with people interested in sports and avoid illegal activities. Even in the case of gangs, there is no proof that they have stopped their illegal, rebellious activities but at least they stopped vandalism and they use the park as any other group in the community. One issue is that the gangs use the park at night when no other groups use the park, so they are still isolated from the community. The park could contribute to initiatives to end gangs and create groups of teenagers that contribute positively to the community.

Teenagers are critical of the physical aspect of the park. They appreciate that they have it because they experienced the time when the park was dirty vacant land. However, they think that aspects such as the environmental quality, maintenance and cleaning are not at their best. Some of them said:

*The airplanes are too loud… that affects people’s hearing.*

*Sometimes people damage the facilities, they use them in wrong ways…people leave rubbish in the park.*
It would be good to have a fence around the park, so it would be protected.

The park doesn’t have a fence because it is public… for the use of everybody.

In this neighbourhood, as well as in the city, people are used to seeing fences placed around public spaces and many park users think it is not against the accessibility to public space, whereas others understand fences as boundaries to public space accessibility.

5.3.3 Adults

From the origin of the neighbourhood, people in Villa have made efforts to acquire an appropriate park for the community. The urban infrastructure and services of this neighbourhood, since its origins, have been deficient. Because of the illegal origin of Villa it did not have urban planning and lacked basic facilities for years. Therefore, Villa residents have been trying, for over 30 years, to improve their private houses and their public space. As the neighbourhood representative said:

Men of the neighbourhood worked together to build a sports court… they cleaned the park because the area used to be a rubbish dump… we got heavy-duty tools and worked on the construction of the court with our own hands.

Adults from the neighbourhood had played a vital role in the construction of the park many years before ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project was created or implemented in the park (see Figure 5.16).
Many adults consider the park as the natural space that relates the best to rural environments. This neighbourhood has a high number of migrants from the countryside, as the neighbourhood representative noted. They have memories of the rural environment where they grew up, and comparatively the city environment is harsh. The park is the only place that they can relate to their memories of the countryside. As the neighbourhood representative said:

*I want this park to be a paradise and I want that the neighbourhood become like a small town.*

He meant a small town with a convivial, close-knit community, a park with good urban and environmental conditions and a neighbourhood that does not alienate or exclude people. The representative also said:

*Many people have no culture about parks, they do not understand what a park is for... some used to bury their dead pets in the park and they did not understand the hygiene problems that this could cause... they treated this park as bush.*
After the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project these negative actions have decreased significantly. It seems that the implementation of the project and the provision of new recreational equipment contributed to more appropriate uses of the park. Urban parks are particular environments that are not rural but resemble various characteristics of rural environments. Thus, it may be the reason why some users do not see the difference between a rural environment and an urban park.

Often, adults say that the park makes them feel happy or content. They relate happiness in the park with a sense of tranquillity and relaxation. Several interviewees said that they go frequently to the park because they are unemployed and the park contributes to diminish their worries. This park is a vital space for people in this neighbourhood because they have restricted access to recreational and leisure facilities elsewhere and in their homes. The most important characteristics for the use of Villa park is that it is easily accessible, it is close to their houses, it is free of charge, and it is completely public.

Parks can be places for social control and social learning (Mockus, 2002). One of the most important characteristics of parks is that social control and social learning is largely self-regulated. People learn how to use the park adequately from experience. They see maintenance as important and expensive so they try to keep the facilities in good condition. They see from the example of others how to use the park and how to share with others. They value this space because in areas like Villa, public space is limited.

This park is a focal centre of the neighbourhood. It is surrounded by houses that progressively have adapted the ground floor for commercial use. It has a main street that connects the neighbourhood with the rest of the city and has a bus stop. Traffic, especially public transport, generates negative impacts in the park. On the other hand, the fact that public transport has stops in front of the park makes Villa Park a place with continuous presence of people and that contributes to the security of the area. The location of the park allows that people access the neighbourhood and leave it from the park. For many, it is a positive experience to arrive from work and cross the park, especially during the day. For others, it is a negative experience if they do it at night because the park has low use at night and as a result they do not feel secure.
5.3.4 Elders

Elders share the same believe of adults that the park resembles the countryside to them. Many elderly people in Villa Park attach rural meanings to their urban neighbourhood park. Senior interviewees consistently compared Villa Park with rural environments from their memories. As a result, they tend to encourage rural values of closeness, sharing and conviviality. These values facilitate using the park actively, taking care of it, transmitting these beliefs to their children and grandchildren and in a way idealising the park’s environment. Many repeated in their interviews that the park provides an atmosphere similar to a small country town, and they really love this character in the park and the neighbourhood because of their countryside background and their memories (see Figure 5.17). However, this view contrasts with the views of some elderly people interviewed who mentioned that the relationships between people are distant and not like in the countryside.

The space of the park offers elders a space for relaxation and rest but additionally it is a space they can use for soft exercise and in some cases it is a therapeutic space. The neighbourhood representative mentioned that some people have therapy for disability in the park, especially elders:
Some people, many of them elders, come here to do exercises for their therapies, some of them have disabilities...sometimes they come with a nurse or therapists and they walk around or do exercises in the playground.

The neighbourhood representative did not explain how elderly people could afford nurses or therapists. However, observations showed that some seniors appeared to do soft exercises sometimes using the children’s playground. Natural environments used for the purposes of healing have been documented in the literature of Environment and Behaviour studies and Nursing. Urban parks can, and have been used for these purposes. However, within the project of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ this use was not considered at least to the extent of the project aims. It is positive that people from Villa, especially the elderly, have been using the park for therapeutic purposes because it demonstrates that the park is an active element in elders’ lifestyles and needs.

5.4 Uses and activities: Affordable recreation for everyone

Uses and activities in Villa Park are the core of spatial practice. Uses and activities provide the park with meaning. The park exists for people to use it and develop recreational activities and social relationships. The dynamic exchanges between people and with their environment occur within the practice of sports, relaxation, civic, religious, environmental and cultural activities. Understanding the way they develop and evolve is noteworthy to the understanding of spatial practice.

5.4.1 Children

The activities developed by children focus on the playground. Observations from both periods of fieldwork confirmed the high use of the playground during all times of the day with over 30 records in 2002 and 40 in 2004 of children’s activity in and around the playground. Children had to queue in the busiest hours to be able to use the few swings available. This occurred because the park has high use, for example during weekends, there were over 200 people using the park at the same time as observations were recorded. The neighbourhood representative mentioned:
This park is used by people from this neighbourhood, plus people from surrounding neighbourhoods. Villa is the only neighbourhood with this size and quality of park, people from other neighbourhoods have to go to a farther park like La Florida…when going there some of people get out of the bus when they see this park because they see is as good and not so far.

In 2002, the activity most refereed to in drawings was playing in the playground, which is expected since it is the especially designated area for children in the park. Figure 5.18 shows the two playgrounds from Villa Park. Drawings from 2004 present a complete picture of the activities that children develop in the park and some of them included sporting events. Children seem to have a clear image of the areas of the park they use. Drawings from 2004 also showed more activities than the drawings from 2002.

Figure 5.18. Villa Park playgrounds.

Observations from 2002 recorded 23 playground related activities and another 10 records from other games from kite playing to playing with construction bricks and playing on the grass. There were 7 records of school related activities. In 2004 observations, there are 24 records of playground activity and 15 records of other games. Children were always very active, constantly smiling, laughing, and calling their parents for assistance and support. They also competed with each other and had small contests between children. These activities were always caring and friendly; there was no record of problems between parents and children. Observations corroborate that in the park there are minimal if not inexistent conflict between parents and children. Contradictorily, the police agent mentioned that the biggest problem in the neighbourhood is domestic violence:
When we get the call or denounce [about domestic violence], we go to the house were the problem is and sometimes we arrest the aggressor... this happens especially when there is influence of alcohol...it is a big problem because women and children are the victims of domestic violence.

The use of the playground influences children’s development in various positive ways. Children learn about civility and sharing by understanding that the facilities are there for everyone to use. It is a negative aspect that there are not enough facilities for the children, but they take this shortcoming in positive ways by creating a variety of games that do not involve the facilities in the playground. This shortcoming also generated some commercial activity because on weekends some individuals set up temporary facilities for children to play and for which they charge small fees (see Figure 5.19).

![Figure 5.19. Rides for children owned by private vendors.](image)

A popular activity was playing with kites; in 2002 fieldwork four children drew this activity (see Figure 5.20). This activity is well established and is part of the cultural traditions of the country. In drawings from 2004, four children identified riding a bicycle as an important activity. Two children drew children playing in the playground. Two children drew people sitting down or walking acknowledging passive recreation. One child drew people playing soccer and people driving cars or buses as well as children in bicycle and playground.
In interviews from 2004, 12 out of 25 people commented that they go to the park mainly to take the children to the park. Some people commented that it is important to take the children to the park because in the house, they do not have open space. At the same time they like to go with the children because they can relax while their children play. In interviews from both phases of fieldwork, they noted that they especially value sunny days because sometimes it can be cold and getting sunshine contributes to children’s wellbeing. The neighbourhood representative from Villa Park stated that there have been various activities with the involvement of children, such as dance performances and the family day where children sing and perform. There are also school performances and contests between different talent groups (see Figure 5.21).
Most children from this neighbourhood visit the park with their families. It was observed that local schools use the park for the sport classes. There were 7 records of school related activities in 2002 and in 2004 the observation was conducted during school holidays. This indicates that because schools do no count on private open space the park is necessary to local schools. Furthermore, these children go to the park for their sports classes and additionally they visit the park in their free time. Thus, some of these children spend long periods of time in the park on a daily basis. This frequent use may produce greater awareness of the park and perhaps greater attachment than for other children who do not spend this amount of time in the park. Observations showed that the use of the park by schools makes the park a dynamic and rich environment.

5.4.2 Teenagers

Observations from both phases of fieldwork showed that teenagers use sport courts very frequently. They usually have to share the facilities because there are often various groups playing at the same time in the same court. Observations from 2002 included over 60 records of sport activity. From those 60 records, 30 were from youth
practicing sports. In 2004 observations there were over 40 records of sport activity and teenagers were again a great number of the participants in sports. Many times there are two, four or even five groups of young people playing basketball at the same time or two groups playing soccer at the same time. Some teenagers played in the grass areas with improvised soccer goalposts. Street interviews confirmed that most teenagers go to the park for practicing sports activities.

Soccer is a very important activity, it is the most popular sport in the country, people are driven by stories of the national team winning, and they love practicing this sport in the park. Organised championships have been running in the neighbourhood for some time. In the second phase of fieldwork the championships were more popular than in the first phase. In 2004 the soccer championship in Villa Park had various categories, such as adults, teenagers and children, women and men. Some teams had sponsorships from the local businesses for the provision of uniforms. These championships involved teams and audiences from other neighbourhoods as well as from Villa (see Figure 5.22).

Figure 5.22. Soccer tournament.

Basketball is the second most popular sport as interviews and observations confirmed. Soccer is more formally organised than basketball. Basketball is a sport that teenagers in Villa Park practice for socialising with other youth. Teams for basketball matches are mixed girls and boys, sometimes they come together as a group of friends, sometimes they meet up in the park and play in order to get to know each other. Both observations and interviews showed that the gangs of the neighbourhood play basketball at night in the most illuminated and popular sports court. Many teenagers go there to watch the others play or to talk to other teenagers while a couple of teams
are playing. They may engage in inappropriate behaviours at this time but there is no proof of that. A young person mentioned:

*I love to play basketball with my friends at any time… especially now that I am on holidays… I live in another city and I really love this holiday here because there are lots of things to do.*

Other sports occur but not in the same frequency as the previous two activities. When teenagers go alone to the park it is usually to workout. Observations showed that teenagers using Villa Park practice a variety of activities such as riding bicycles, skating, boxing, and baseball. Teenagers noted in the interviews that the park does not have enough facilities (see Figure 5.23). Many youth would like to have more courts, others would like to have a pool, or skating areas, in general they would like to have a park more specialised in sports.

![Figure 5.23. Various groups using one sports court](image)

In night observations of the park during 2002, it was observed that teenagers practice a great variety of activities. There were rap music rehearsals; they were using the playground because at this time there were no children using it. Some other young people were practicing break dancing in both day and night time. The break dancing group seems to be well established, they practice frequently and other people who are not in the group have watched them and have enjoyed observing them. The variety of activities that teenagers practice, are good indicators of the high interest they have in sports, dancing and cultural activities in the park. It may be possible that if the neighbourhood association provides incentives to strengthen and create artistic and
cultural groups, the teenagers may get involved actively and in that way help to overcome negative influences such as gangs.

Many teenagers also enjoy passive recreation, sitting on benches in big groups talking, making jokes, and flirting. Many teenagers wonder around the park in couples, it seems that for young lovers the park is the most accessible space to get together. They sit on benches, have ice cream, kiss and hug, and talk and smile. For teenagers, it is important that parents and adults understand that teenagers need some space to develop their relationships and if they meet in the park it is a good indicator that they are socialising in a positive environment instead of bars or clubs where underage teens should not go.

**5.4.3 Adults**

Adults usually practice passive recreation activities, such as observing, relaxing, resting, lying on the grass, supervising children’s games, talking to neighbours, family and friends, or looking at games during championships. The older adults, 36 to 64 years old, seem to prefer passive recreation. Some noted that they do not have the fitness to practice sports or that they have some type of disability. Many adults see that passive recreation may have therapeutic effects because it helps to clear the mind by practicing low impact exercise.

The younger adults seem more willing to practice sports and for most of them the soccer championships are important. These adults also stated that, many times, they take care of their children and do not practice exercise; for that reason they sometimes like to go to the park alone to be able to workout and exercise. Soccer championships occurred during both phases of research. The championships included several categories such as junior and adults, female, male and mixed teams. Therefore it is an opportunity for age groups to interact. These tournaments were created by the community and the neighbourhood association has been supporting the activity. All park users know about them and many participate actively in playing, refereeing, or cheering and the others enjoy watching the games.
Most adults are interested in the social, cultural and educational activities that occur in the park because that encourages neighbourhood’s conviviality. A number of adults noted that when the parks’ project was implemented there were various recreational activities conducted by the city administration:

*They [the government] use to do aerobics on the weekends and there use to be recreation guides for children but they stopped doing that sometime ago and now we have to recreate ourselves (laugh)…*

*There has been activities led by the neighbourhood association, I remember especially family day when children were performing traditional dances…there has been bazaars in which neighbours come to buy food and drinks and have some fun in the park…I wish there were more activities like that.*

In interviews adults said that they would like to have more recreational, educational and cultural activities for themselves and for the children. The lack of accessibility to cultural and recreational activities is evident in the neighbourhood. Most of these types of activities in the city are expensive or very far from the neighbourhood and people in Villa Park believe the park is a good location for cultural activities, not only for sports and relaxation. Some of them said:

*I would like to have aerobics classes… it is nice to bring the children but sometimes we [women] need some activities especially for us [women].*

*I would like that this park had recreation guides so our children could have more choices for games and get together with other children in guided games.*

*I want to have activities such as ecological campaigns for children so they learn to take care of our natural environment, because the parents are not willing to participate in them.*

*I would like to have cultural activities such as theatre, performances and arts in this park for children and adults.*
One interviewee said that he goes to the park to work (see Figure 5.24). Observations showed that there are a number of street vendors working informally in the park. The person interviewed goes to the park on weekends and rents electric mini cars to children. He said that the park is very important for him because it is a good environment and it is his workplace. In his own words:

*I am very grateful to the neighbourhood association that lets me work here, I know the city administration is against it but I got permission from this community to work here...jobs like this [informal] are the only choice for people like me. Because of my age I cannot get a common job...self employment is my way of survival since I lost my job years ago. I believe I provide a good service to people from Villa, I am offering another source of entertainment for children and because the playground is so full all the time, my mini-cars are another choice for children...very cheap choice...there are children with disabilities like Down's syndrome who come here to use my cars, I supervise that they are alright and their parents are happy because the children enjoy it. The park is part of my life because I need it for my survival, to get money to provide for the family. Vendors should help with the cleaning of the park because it is our responsibility.*

The fact that there are a few permanent street vendors with the agreement of the community seems to work well for this park. The person interviewed has been working in the park for about two years. Informal work is an increasing phenomenon in Latin America, even if it is a problem for municipal governments (A. Gilbert,
1996). It appears that allowing a few street vendors in this park contributes to improving the dynamics of the park. These vendors are now known in the community, and park users do not see them as a negative influence; they see them as supporters of the active life of the park. However, this may not be the case for other public spaces in the city. Recently debate has arisen in Bogotá because the municipal administration, after Peñaloza’s administration, allowed informal vendors in many places of the city. Consequently, according to the ex-mayor, the quality of public space deteriorated (Penaloza, 2001).

### 5.4.4 Elders

The majority of elders in Villa go to the park for passive recreation. Activities such as walking, sitting in benches, observing other people, resting, and taking sunshine were among their preferences as stated in interviews. Passive recreation is often linked to therapeutic effects on people of all ages, but especially for elders. Passive recreation is important for elders’ wellbeing. Many elderly people are not likely to play sports because of their age or their health conditions, as they noted in interviews. However, they could be encouraged to practice specific sports appropriate for their age. Many stated that they would like to have the possibility to join groups of seniors and practice low impact sports. As a senior commented:

> I would like that the park had gymnastics for elders and groups of elders to participate in sport activities.

The adult population in this neighbourhood is high, as well as the frequency of the use of the park. However, recreation for elders appears to be limited. There is a lack of recreational activities addressed to elders. Interviewees mentioned that they used to have recreation professionals guiding children’s games, but this type of service has not been provided to elderly park users. There is potential in this park for involving the aging community in appropriate groups and networks for recreation and leisure. It is also important to engage in activities with the aging population of Villa Park because some mentioned that they often feel lonely or isolated.

One of the most particular activities observed and recorded in interviews was training roosters for fights (see Figure 5.25). It appears that elders in Villa Park have
incorporated this traditionally peasant and rural custom to the activities of the park. Cockfights occur in some private places in the neighbourhood, but some people, including an elderly interviewee, take roosters to the park for training. He mentioned:

*I come here everyday to train the roosters... I come with my wife; we both take care of the park and check that children and teenagers are not damaging the trees...I like this park especially because I can train my roosters here... I meet with other guys who also have these animals and we have the fights in a ring nearby on weekends... the ring is inside a house near the park...that is my main way of entertainment... I also come to the park to entertain the eyes...to observe things that happen in the park is interesting.*

![Figure 5.25. Training for Cockfights.](image)

It appears that this activity does not bother any other users in the park. They see cockfights as an activity incorporated into the general recreation of the park. It appears that Villa Park users are flexible to a wide range of activities, some of which are influenced by peasant and rural traditions.

5.5 Administrative and socio-political issues:

**Building the park and building the norms**

This section discusses issues that arise from uses and interactions of people in the park but that transcend the recreational activity. Issues such as how to regulate recreation, or establishing rules for conviviality are not part of the recreational activity
itself but are regulatory elements to ensure the sustainability of recreational exchanges. Park users negotiate elements such as cleaning, maintenance, and norms of behaviour. However, sometimes they need the involvement of other stakeholders such as the Sports and Recreation Department, to ensure the successful functioning of the park in the long term.

5.5.1 Children

Security is an important issue to the majority of park users in Villa. Children’s sense of security can be used as an indicator of the degree of security of the park. It appears that children feel secure when using the park because in their drawings they drew safe and enjoyable environments; sometimes they pictured images related to the police, who control the area. The general belief of citizens in Bogotá is that neighbourhoods from low socio-economic status are dangerous. However, the experience in Villa Park shows otherwise because children use the park without fear and despite the fact that they count on adult supervision, the atmosphere of the park is relaxed and safe in terms of security. In an interview with the police agent in charge of the security of the neighbourhood and the park, he noted that there are no major disturbances in the park. He noted that the biggest problem in the neighbourhood is domestic violence inside the houses, not in the public space. The disturbances tend to occur outside the park. There was no record of problems between parents and children in the park. This shows that even if some Villa residents experience domestic violence at home, when going to the park they go with a different attitude.

Various people acknowledged the shortage of playground facilities compared with the number of children using them. The majority of park users value the park as a secure, pleasant and adequate place to take the children. Since the project of parks, Villa Park had a significant transformation and most park users are aware of and grateful for that. However, they would like to have more playground facilities because children often have to wait to use the playground facilities as it has high use (see Figure 5.26). Interestingly, because these facilities do not cope with the frequency of use and numbers of users, it seems that by sharing, children learn about conviviality and tolerance. However, it is detrimental to the park that the playground facilities are not adequate for children using this park.
The neighbourhood representative has paid close attention to children’s needs. He started his communitarian work in a local school by becoming a parent’s representative. Because of his good work and commitment in the local school, he was later elected as neighbourhood representative and now he is a very important community leader in the area. He made various comments about children, for instance:

*I think children and elders as the most important users of the park because they provide different qualities to the park…children are the happiness and elders represent tranquillity.*

The majority of park users agree that children are important park users, not only the park facilities are often addressed to children but also the presence of children enriches the atmosphere of the park. Thus, administrative initiatives need to take into account ways to improve security of children as a vulnerable age group of park users, and the provision of adequate facilities for children because their presence in the park is vital to the sustainability and positive atmosphere of the park.

### 5.5.2 Teenagers

In 1989 the neighbourhood representative became the president of the association and he organised talks with gangs, mainly formed by youth. The gangs and the neighbourhood association came to an agreement. In this agreement teenagers requested the provision of sports fields in good condition and with adequate maintenance, and the community expected that they will take care of the facilities and would not use the park for delinquency.
For teenagers, security issues in the park are important. Several youth noted that the presence of police (in the second phase of fieldwork) has been advantageous for the park. In general, youth like to go to the park because they consider it a safe place. Some acknowledged that there have been some incidents, especially at night, but in general the park is considered a safe place in the neighbourhood. Observations showed that when the park is full of people it is unlikely that any security incidents will happen. In 2002, some observations recorded youth seeking isolated areas of the park and behaving in possibly suspicious ways. However, no negative incidents were observed during fieldwork.

Night observations from both phases of fieldwork showed that the park has good lighting at night and that it is mainly used by teenagers at night time. Teenagers gathered around one of the sports courts. Some of them were playing and many others were watching the games and at the same time interacting in different groups. Some groups were flirting, there were groups talking and laughing. There were no fights, arguments or police raids during these observations, the atmosphere was calm and safe. However, some interviewees commented that they think this gatherings of some youth are night may make the park dangerous.

Teenagers know there are rules in the park. The park has signs that tell people how to use the park and behave appropriately (see Figure 5.27). The public notices state:

*Place rubbish inside the bins.*

*Public Park, Villa Gladys, this park is for everybody, take care of it! alcoholic drinks and street vendors are banned, pets should have collars. Message from Neighbours and Friends.*
These signs are placed around the park and they provide specific information about the rules of the park in a friendly way. Most teenagers understand and pay attention to these signs and they even have their own interpretations of them. The rule that teenagers seem to regard as the most important is that the park must be keep clean. All interviewees stated that they do not throw rubbish in the park and many of them said that they pick up the rubbish when they see it. Youth also criticised the maintenance of the park, they noted that cleaning is not good enough and it needs to improve. A few teenagers mentioned that the waste from dogs is a big problem. One young person said,

*Guys should not pee in the park.*

Observations confirmed that this action actually happens. That means that education in regards of norms and behaviours in parks are needed. The majority of youth are aware that the administration of the city intervened in the construction of this park. They also expressed that the neighbourhood representative is an important leader in the community and he is very interested in the park. A number of teenagers acknowledged that the Sports and Recreation Department and the Office of the Mayor have been involved in the construction of the park. Teenagers remembered, or had heard about the detrimental condition of the park before the implementation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’. Youth appear to be satisfied with the physical transformation of Villa Park. However, some stated that the maintenance is not as
good as it was in the beginning. They had not seen the involvement of the municipal administration in recent times. Youth expressed the view that the municipal administration needs to generate more initiatives which involve youth because they would like to participate.

5.5.3 Adults

Adults acknowledge that administrative, social and political issues in this park are an important part of the neighbourhood’s history. The illegal origin of the park brought difficult environmental and urban conditions. Public space was disregarded because land speculators sold land without proper urban infrastructure. The neighbourhood representative commented that they had gone through administrative processes for many years to become a legal neighbourhood, obtain services and improve the urban conditions of the neighbourhood.

The park was a need for the community but not a priority because they first needed running water and electricity before having a park. The neighbourhood representative encouraged people in the neighbourhood association to build a park in vacant land. The community requested support from the municipal administration long before the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project was conceived. There were cleaning campaigns because the vacant land, which eventually became the park, used to be a dump. There was the construction of sports courts in 1985, which were vandalised, and later after 1990 which were maintained. The municipal administration provided construction materials and neighbourhood residents built the courts. This was an advance not only in terms of empowerment of the community and participation but also in terms of creating a culture for parks and recreation in the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood had vacant land with only two sports courts, and the community had a greater need for a public space for entertainment, recreation and to spend their free time. The ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project and specifically the design, building and maintenance of Villa Park empowered this community because they could experience the direct action of the municipal government in their neighbourhood (see Figure 5.28). The community had struggled to gain better
conditions for their neighbourhood before the project and they saw positive actions being taken.

![Figure 5.28. Community members with Mayor Peñaloza when park was completed.](Archival, Medina 2000)

With regards to administrative involvement in the neighbourhood, the neighbourhood representative commented that his role includes negotiation between people and government, and mediation in conflicts between the community and the municipal government. At the same time he tries to increase awareness in the community about the role of public space in the neighbourhood and helps to decrease the negative image of the municipal administration that residents often have. Communication and education within the community and with the municipal government are some of his priorities.

Regarding security, adults generally feel safe in the park. However they relate safety with the presence of the police and not with the frequency of activities in the park. They noted that since the police trailer goes to the park, Villa Park is safer. Before, there were robberies and attacks and with the presence of police they decreased significantly. Interestingly, adult park users do not link the impacts of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project to improving security in the park and the neighbourhood. Most adults think that despite security having improved in the park, it still could be better, especially at night. During the day public space is regulated by its high use, and the surveillance from police officers. However, at night use is very low, and there is no police surveillance. There are people arriving from work after 10 p.m. and it seems it is distressing for them to cross the park at that time. The police trailer
arriving and leaving on daily basis is part of the program called ‘Safe zones’, an initiative from the Metropolitan Police of Bogotá. Figure 5.29 shows the police trailer located in Villa Park and a poster stating the aim of the ‘Safe zones’ program. The aim is according to the poster, to bring justice to citizens by providing surveillance services free of charge.

![Police trailer and sign with the objective of the police initiative.](image)

**Figure 5.29.** Police trailer and sign with the objective of the police initiative.

In terms of cleaning and maintenance, the majority of adults highlighted that the park is cleaner than years ago but that users need to be educated in this regard. It is interesting that the majority of interviewees said that they keep the park clean when they use it, but that other users do not maintain cleaning standards. This perception corroborates a study (Mockus, 2002), on social learning and social control in this Bogotá. This study shows that individuals, when living in communities, tend to think that others do not obey rules but they personally obey them. This study argues, at least in the context of Bogotá, that people develop a tacit distrust in others while believing that personally they are better citizens than others (Mockus, 2002). The study points out that parks are spaces for learning through example and experience, and in that sense parks are tools for facilitating learning, tolerance, and conviviality.

There is a problem in Villa Park with homeless dogs and, sometimes, the careless behaviour of some dog owners. Some park users commented:
Many dog owners don’t pick up the waste from their dogs and that is really disgusting… we want to sit on the grass and enjoy a clean park…they should carry bags and pick up the dirt from their dogs.

I don’t like those youth teaching dogs how to fight, that is very dangerous for our kids and for us…I have heard that dogs can even kill people…they shouldn’t be allowed in the park, it is a potential danger for all people in the park.

With regards to dogs three main problems were identified. First, homeless dogs are a big problem for the community because they have no vaccinations and could transmit diseases and nobody cleans their waste. The neighbourhood representative commented that he was lobbying in the local government to get an organisation that will pick up those dogs and take them away from the park.

Second, many people who have dogs do not clean their dogs’ waste. This problem seems to be general for the whole city, the municipal health secretariat conducted a study of the hygiene problems related to pets’ waste in public space and in their findings they stated that education of pet owners is an important factor for diminishing the problem.

The third problem is a specific problem in Villa Park; it seems there are a few people who train their dogs for fighting (see Figure 5.30). Dogs are dangerous animals if they are taught violent practices and it seems these people do not acknowledge that this is a risk for themselves and the community.

The neighbourhood representative also mentioned that he was trying to get the municipal Health Department to solve the problem of homeless dogs because they are a sanitary threat to the community. However, these processes take a long time before action is taken. Therefore, the homeless dogs were in the park for the whole period of fieldwork despite the fact that the petition to pick them up was already made.
5.5.4 Elders

Elders have assumed the role of caretakers of the park. Most elders interviewed in both phases of research stated that they like to take care of the park and stop actions of other park users that are negative to the park. They are very interested in taking care of the trees and vegetation of the park. They said that they have seen children breaking branches and climbing trees that do not resist their weight. An elder mentioned:

*I come to the park everyday, I spray water on trees, especially that one [points with his finger] because I consider it like mine… I also sweep this part of the park because it is usually dirty…sometimes young boys are rude to me when I tell them not to climb the trees and they tell me it is not my business and get lost… I remember all parks in Cali [another city] had caretakers, the parks here should have the same… I try to take care of it.*

Other senior interviewees made similar comments related to the feeling of responsibility to take care of the park personally. Some elders mentioned that the maintenance of the park used to be better when the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ was recently developed but now the municipal government has decreased its action. Seniors also acknowledged that private companies took the responsibility of
the cleaning of this park for a while but they also said that their performance has not been significant or at least they cannot see much maintenance.

All elders mentioned that what the park what really lacks is interaction between people. They said that it would be good to have groups of neighbours in the park just for chatting. As mentioned previously elders tend to be isolated, they have the willingness to form groups but they need support from the community. It would be of great benefit if the neighbourhood association could organise some networks focusing on elders. The park has a variety of activities and spaces for children and teenagers but spaces for elders have not been designed specifically, apart from benches there are not specific design elements addressed to elders.

5.6 Identity and Sense of Belonging: When a dream comes true

This section addresses perceptions of park users in regards to identity with and attachment to the park. Park users sometimes expressed feelings of a sense of belonging, at the same time these feelings may be encouraged through the use of parks. These perceptions and feelings influence the way park users envision and use the park for the future. Thus, a sense of belonging or identification with the park is an important component of spatial practice. It is also a significant element to continue reaffirming the park in its social, physical, historical, urban and administrative dimensions.

5.6.1 Children

Drawings from 2002 did not show the level of detail and clarity of the drawings from 2004. This may mean that the continuous use of the park makes children more attached to the park or perhaps more aware of their experiences in the park. The fact that some children from local schools spend time in the park as a part of their school routine, strengthens the idea that the large majority of children use this park on daily basis. Continuous use of the park may be a reason for the increasing place attachment in Villa Park.
In 2002, half of the children drew hearts (see Figure 5.31). Hearts mean care or love for someone or something. In this case it could be an evidence of identity and sense of belonging. The hearts also may represent the joy and enthusiasm that children put in the drawings. The hearts also mean that the park is an enjoyable setting for children and is a place where they like to spend their time. In contrast, drawings from 2004 do not show any explicit sign of care or attachment. However, they showed detail and clear understanding of the features of the park. All drawings showed that children believe the park is a pleasant environment because they drew children smiling and playing.

Figure 5.31. Drawing from a 7-year-old

Detached children, especially in low-income neighbourhoods, are potential recruits for gangs when they grow older. The gangs have decreased in the neighbourhood since the existence of the park. The neighbourhood representative made the direct link between decreasing of gangs and increasing space for healthy recreation for children. If a sense of belonging and identity are built by the use of the park, the park generates benefits for children and the whole community in the long-term. What children learn in the park in terms of living in community, sharing, and building relationships with
parents, relatives, and neighbours may contribute to build long lasting relationships with neighbours, family and relatives. Children’s positive experiences in the park perhaps will contribute to children to become role models as adults in the future.

Flying kites directly contributes to identity and sense of belonging in the park. However, this is a cultural tradition in the country and occurs in most public spaces in Bogotá and other towns of the region. It is a very important activity because it unites family, friends and neighbours and it happens only during August. It is also a grounded tradition in the community. This activity is accessible to all social classes since simple kites are inexpensive and some children make their own with plastic bags and other materials that are easy to obtain.

5.6.2 Teenagers

Soccer championships are important to strengthen a sense of belonging and identity in the community. The second phase of fieldwork in 2004 showed that this event has become more relevant to the neighbourhood, especially because they now compete with other neighbourhoods in children, junior and adult matches. This activity brings the community together with a common purpose and may contribute to conviviality in the neighbourhood. Figure 5.32 shows a family with members of all ages participating in the soccer tournament, some playing and some watching the games.

Figure 5.32. Family participating in soccer tournament
The use of the park, especially over the long-term, seems to generate a sense of belonging or some sense of attachment. One of the youth interviewed said:

*I like the park because I have lots of memories from here...some of them bad but many of them very good...I especially remember that I met my first girlfriend here. When I was a child I just wanted to play so did not care if the park was pretty or ugly [the park was not properly designed at that time]. When I am alone and I feel down I like to come here to cheer up, being here helps me to chill out and feel better.*

Another youth stated that the park is a place outside of his home where he ‘feels good’. Experiencing the park seems to produce feelings in people that later become generally positive memories. In that way the use of the park can be directly related to the generation of a sense of identity and sense of belonging.

When youth were asked what would they add or take away from the park, most interviewees stated that they would like to add more sports facilities, for instance a pool, or skate court, or more sport courts. One said that she would like to have more playground facilities. Teenagers also mentioned that they would like to have guided recreation, cultural events and more sports events organised to bring the community together, perhaps delivered by the municipal administration. These comments showed that teenagers think about the improvements they would like and that they are related to diversify the uses of the park. This reaffirms the idea that the high use of the park contributes to generate a sense of identification with the park and the community, more conviviality, more sharing and by extension, a sense of belonging.

### 5.6.3 Adults

Adults from the neighbourhood had played a vital role in the construction of the park, many years before the park was even designed and constructed during the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. As the neighbourhood representative commented:

*Men of the neighbourhood worked to build a sports court and they cleaned the park because the area used to be a rubbish dump.*
Perhaps the most important factor that contributed to identity and sense of belonging is that adults from the neighbourhood had experienced the physical, social, economic and administrative struggle for consolidating their neighbourhood and the park. This park provides vivid evidence that their efforts were fruitful and they feel proud of having a good park that they can use and where their children can play. Adults may feel that this newly built park is a heritage from them to the younger generations. They also perceive that the lives of their families will not be as difficult as their own because they participated in the full construction and consolidation of the neighbourhood.

The implementation of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project in this neighbourhood contributed to the empowerment of the community and to decreased feelings of being alienated. Park users also perceived that their government finally was taking them into account for urban improvements. An adult park user commented:

*It is good they [government] built this park because they used to make improvements in the areas where the rich live and not in poor neighbourhoods.*

The park has improved significantly the appearance and quality of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the neighbourhood representative commented that the newly built park improved the value of people’s properties. Many adults were concerned that a new park in the neighbourhood would increase their taxes, as the neighbourhood representative stated. It seems that the increase did not happen or was not strongly perceived because none made such comments in the interviews. They do not pay high taxes because they are from a low-income area but the payment of taxes affects their finances greatly.

### 5.6.4 Elders

Elders’ perceptions in terms of sense of belonging and identity are similar to adults’ perceptions. However, they are nostalgic about the differences in social interactions from the places of their childhood, and the neighbourhood. This age group is grateful about having a park because they experienced the time when it was merely vacant.
land. However, they still feel isolated because people are not as social and close as they were used to in rural towns.

They show their attachment and sense of belonging to the park especially in the way they are concerned about the natural environment. They care a lot for preserving trees and vegetation in good condition and they tell off people when they see inappropriate treatment of vegetation. Their nurturing nature is characteristic of seniors and that benefits greatly Villa Park. Seniors dislike the fact that there is a lot of traffic around the park because that decreases its environmental quality (see Figure 5.33). However, they know that high traffic is a common characteristic of large cities.

Figure 5.33. Damage resulting from public transport and high traffic

It is important to strengthen the potential of parks for improving networks of elders who can interact and establish close relationships. Seniors need groups and support from neighbours to deal with the problems they face daily, especially the ones who live alone. Apart from families units, people tend to interact more with people from their same age in the park. The integration of park users of all ages, perhaps in interest groups, such as gardening, cooking or playing could be highly beneficial for improving identity and sense of belonging within the community and in the park.
5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the ways in which spatial practice is carried out in Villa Park. The relationships between people in the park show that each age group displays different orientations towards parks and recreation. Children for instance, have a strong orientation towards the playground. For them, the park is mainly formed by the playground. Furthermore, children see the park as their domain. Children rarely identify the presence of adults in the park and when they acknowledge the presence of adults they do not perceive them as authority figures in the park. Children also are aware of the natural environment and the weather conditions in the park since these characteristics affect the way they use the park.

Youth relate to other people in the park, and especially to people similar to their age, for socialisation purposes. Youth in Villa Park use the park for socialisation with other youth, especially through the practice of team sports. Sometimes they feel alienated from other groups such as adults and elders. However, they perceive issues related to the park, which are overlooked by other stakeholders. Youth seem to be dismissed from participatory processes, despite the fact that they have an analytical perspective that can contribute to the improvement of the park.

Adults seem to have strong attachment to the park in terms of their contribution to the construction of the park over the years. Furthermore, they highly regard issues of maintenance and management of the park. Interestingly, they seem to relate recreation and leisure to other age groups and not themselves. However, their involvement in recreational activities seems to be increasing over time and their recreational activities are being more formally organised.

Elders are very important users of the park because the park is an environment that they use on a daily basis. Many times they act as carers of their grandchildren and other times they are neglected by relatives or do not have relatives who take care of them. In both cases elders seem to feel isolated and lonely because they were used to more convivial environments, for example in rural towns. Villa Park needs more adequate design to respond to elders’ needs.
The richness of these spatial practices and urban public life instigates the discussion on how space is produced in urban settings. Villa provides evidence of how the ideal of constructing a park during years was highly challenged, but the perseverance of the community and the strength of people’s need for recreation resulted in the eventual consolidation of the park. This park still presents various challenges and potentials for improvement, they constitute the continuous development of spatial practice and urban public life in this neighbourhood. The next chapter discusses issues in Niza Park; this park has similarities and differences that will be discussed in the following chapter based on the comparison of the two cases.
Chapter 6: Niza Park, ‘our park, our peace of mind’
6.1 Introduction

Figure 6.1. Panoramic view Niza Park

This chapter explores the ways spatial practice occurs in Niza Park. Figure 6.1 shows a panoramic image of the park and its surroundings. Niza is a neighbourhood park that shares some similarities with Villa Park. They both have similar size area, and a similar number of facilities. Applying the same question to the two parks provides an in depth understanding of each park, and provides tools for comparative analysis. This comparative analysis will be addressed in the next chapter.

- **How do the reciprocal interactions between parks and communities shape spatial practice and urban public life in two neighbourhood parks in Bogotá?**

Niza Park was primarily selected for one of the two case studies because it belongs to a high-income area of Bogotá and is part of the network of over four thousand neighbourhood parks in the city. The project of parks ‘Parks for learning how to live’ executed some initiatives in Niza. However, it did not represent a significant change in the park compared to the work conducted in Villa Park. For planning purposes all neighbourhood parks in the city are classified under the same standards. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the municipal administration considered all neighbourhood parks as equal. However, this exploration of Niza Park shows that this park presents a number of particular characteristics that makes it different from others local parks.
This chapter replicates the structure of Chapter 5. Thus, it follows the five main topics that resulted from an interpretative analysis of the data (Silverman, 2001). Interpretative analysis incorporates a dialogue between the assumptions of the researcher with the data. As with Chapter 5, the variety of issues explored and their interconnections generated some unavoidable overlap of topics. The number of interviews is relatively small but when compared with the low use of the Niza Park, interviews are a significant representation of park users. They provide in depth insights from park users and stakeholders. These insights are supported by the other methods conducted and that are part of the adaptation of Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures used in this research. The methods applied had as a principle to gather information about perceptions, experiences and qualitative characteristics of different park users. This information is not meant to be statistical or quantitative, however, sometimes it is necessary to mention some measures, but always focusing on the qualitative nature of the information.

This chapter discusses five specific topics: Interactions between people, Interactions between people and parks, uses and activities, administrative and socio-political issues and identity, and sense of belonging. Within these five topics, the discussion is organised around age groups. Children, youth, adults and elders are groups that perceive and use the park in different ways, while sharing some commonalities. Specifically, age group interactions are an important perspective in order to understand spatial practice in this park. As mentioned in the previous chapter, children participants were from 4 to 12 years old. Youth are between 12 to 19 years old, they are generally known as teenagers. Adults are from 20 to 64 years old; Elders in this research are from 65 years and older.

Each section discusses in-depth the perspectives of different age groups. Interactions between people analyses the relationships park users develop in the park, focusing on group interactions. Interactions between people and the environment examines the way people perceive the physical environment of the park and how the physical settings influence park users behaviours. The Uses and activities section explores the issue of spatial practice by relating activities with users’ behaviours and the landscape of the park. Administrative and socio-political issues refer to the elements that affect spatial practice in the park but are a result from using the park or instrumental to the
use of the park. *Identity and sense of belonging* refer to beliefs and values that people may attach to the park but come from memories or other experiences in similar types of spaces.

6.2 Interactions between people: It is everyone’s park, it belongs to the community

This section discusses the interactions between people in the park and how park users perceive others and themselves, taking into account different age groups. This analysis focuses on groups and not on individuals, and the way groups relate between them and to each other in terms of developing recreational activities. These interactions constitute an essential element of spatial practice because they develop naturally in the space according to park users’ needs in terms of recreation and their contribution to recreation. This section addresses the specific interactions between people in the park attempting to separate these interactions from the relationships of people with the space for analytical purposes but acknowledging that the experience of public space is holistic.

6.2.1 Children

Niza Park has low use compared to Villa Park, and children may perceive this characteristic strongly. For instance in drawings from 2002, only two children drew people. In drawings from 2004 children did not draw themselves or other people in the park. Perhaps they understood the instruction of drawing the park as drawing the physical elements only. Another reason could be that because many of the children who made the drawings were visitors to the neighbourhood, they may not be familiar with the use of the park. At the time the drawings were made, the park was almost empty. However, four children identified, as residents of the neighbourhood, did not draw people either. The reason may be that the park has kept its low use during 2002 and 2004. Despite the fact that observations from 2004 recorded more activities than the observations from 2002, in general the park has maintained similar trends of low use.
The two children that drew people in the park drew other children, not adults (see Figure 6.2). This is a validation that children see the park as a space mainly for children, or they may think that they are very important users. Children have a strong perception that the park is their domain. Not only do children consider Niza Park as their domain but also some adults stated that their only purpose to visit the park is to take their children to the park.

Figure 6.2. Child’s drawing 12 years old
Playground activity appears to be the preferred activity for children in Niza. In 2002 observations, 16 groups were playing in, and nearby the playground. Most groups were families or adults related to children. Only one group were two unsupervised children. In the observations from 2004, 25 groups composed of related children and adults, were playing in the playground. It seems that the use, at least in the playground, in 2004 increased a little. Out of the 25 groups, one group were teenagers only, and one was a group of two unsupervised children.

The behaviour of these groups was enthusiastic; children were very active. They were running, jumping, calling other children or relatives aloud. Children like challenge in their games and friendly competition. Often parents cheered and celebrated when the children showed their skills. It seems that most of the time, they had fun and enjoyed the park. Parents or relatives often interacted with the children in a passive way. They gave directions to children; they also cheered them up and helped them by pushing the swing or assist them in the slide. They were supportive, caring and they had frequent expressions of love such as hugs and kisses. In cases where the carer was the nanny, the relationship was not as close but nannies participated in the games or sometimes took care of children by looking at them and giving them directions. Sometimes both children and adults met other people and talk to others. No conflict was observed in Niza Park at any time.

Street interviews in 2002 indicated that more than half of the interviewees (15 out of 25) visited the park with children. Many of them were parents and nannies. Eight of these interviewees said that they played with the children and the other seven said they go to supervise the children. Street interviews from 2004 showed that a third of the interviewees (8 out of 20) visited the park with children. The majority of these interviewees were the parents. Clearly adults are present when children visit the park. Even the groups of children that were in the park without adult parents or relatives, were under the security guard’s supervision. When parents or relatives interact with children it seems that the authority roles that children experience at home vary in the park. Parents tend to ease their authority with children and give them more freedom when going to the park; they become assistants for children’s games or they stay in
the background. This change of roles is evidenced especially at the time of leaving the park. Sometimes parents had to reprimand their children because they refused to leave the park when parents told them to do so.

The relationship between carers and children in the park appears to be different from their relationship in other settings. For some it is their responsibility to take children to the park because recreation in the park is important for children’s wellbeing. In street interviews most adults taking children to the park acknowledged that they were doing so because children need to spend time in the park. Adults seem to express love and care towards their children comfortably in the park. If they needed to discipline their children they seemed uneasy doing so in the park. The interactions of families in this park are important to the healthy development of children. They learn issues like friendly competition and cooperation with their siblings, and at the same time their parents have the opportunity to focus on their children and congratulate them for their performance and improvement in games. They also practice games, which helped them to keep active and avoid sedentary lifestyles. Figure 6.3 shows the two playgrounds available in this park.

Figure 6.3. Children’s Playgrounds Niza Park

The setting of the park contributes to boost trust between parents or carers and children. For instance, it was observed that a girl who was scared of using the slide, recorded in the observations from 2004, her carer was supportive and helped the girl to overcome her fears. Carers have the role of ensuring security and protection to children, and when children are scared or feel in danger it is important that they are present to built children’s trust and self-esteem.
6.2.2 Teenagers

Interviews from both phases of research showed that teenagers from Niza visit the park mainly with friends and sometimes with family and relatives. Teenagers who stated they do not live in the neighbourhood go to the park regularly because they are part of sports or social groups. As some said:

*I am not from here, I live far away...I come here for the Karate training every weekend.*

*I study in a school nearby, I like to come to the park after school or sometimes to skip boring classes [giggles]...It is a good place to chill out and spend time with friends.*

These comments show that teenagers frequent the park for leisure or sport activities and it shows that they prefer to go to the park in groups or join groups to socialise. Teenagers who are residents of the neighbourhood go to the park more often than the visitors, they go to walk their pets and mainly for passive recreation. The interactions of teenagers occurred mainly within their age group. They go to meet others of their same age or they go in groups. In this park they do not practice sports as much as in Villa Park. Organised sports were observed only on the weekends. This park is mainly used for passive recreation so when teenagers meet in this park they sit down, they talk, laugh, listen to music, some of them smoke cigarettes. Furthermore, the scenery of the park encourages passive recreation in which youth get involved (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. Niza Park scenery
Observations show that many teenagers go to the park with children, adults and sometimes elders. In Niza teenagers visit the park with friends, go to the park with their families and go alone sometimes. The socialisation trend in Niza is not easily observable, teenagers mentioned in their interviews that they go to meet friends but these groups were in the park only a few times during observations. A teenager said:

$I belong to a group of about 24, we are all from the neighbourhood, we have known each other since we were kids… we grew up here, we come to the park to meet, play sports and chat… sometimes during holidays we organise a camping trip to a farm in the countryside.

This group appears to be a consolidated group of youth that meet informally in the sense that they are not engaged in activities that required high commitment. This group is not a gang and parents seem to know and approve this group. It is interesting that they also plan activities outside the park. It may mean that the park is instrumental in strengthening the group’s relationships or friendship and the relationships transcend the place. In other cases, such as the Karate group, they appear to meet only in the park and their relationship is only related to the sport. In both cases the park is a significant place to facilitate the generation of social networks such as this youth group or just a space for informal socialisation.

Night observations from both phases show that some teenagers go to the park at this time to be alone and perhaps to smoke marihuana. During night observations the teenagers who visited the park were usually alone. They were never caught doing anything wrong during observations. However, the security guard and the neighbourhood representative mentioned that smoking marihuana or drinking alcohol mainly at night were common disturbances. As the neighbourhood representative declared:

That is a problem… some kids, who are not from the neighbourhood, come here at night to the darkest parts of the park and smoke marihuana or drink alcohol… the guard is instructed to stop it when he sees it, he can also call the police if necessary.
This comment implies that teenagers visiting the park at night may be going to the park to do wrongdoings. It also implies that these teenagers are not from the neighbourhood, but that assumption is a very difficult to prove. It may just be a perception of the neighbourhood representative and may not reflect the truth. In terms of the relationship between different age groups, this comment compared with others from teenagers show that there may be some tension between teenagers and adults. Adults seem to think that some youth represent trouble in the park and teenagers feel that they are judged and stereotyped.

A few interviewees stated that there were some clashes in the interactions between teenagers and elders. Observation records show that this park is highly used by elder visitors. In their interviews teenagers made comments about the difficult relationship between elders and teenagers. A teenager said:

_Elderly people have no patience, they are always annoyed with us… they accuse us of bad behaviour…and we are not doing anything wrong, maybe just some noise… we are just having some fun._

This comment shows that some teenagers may feel isolated from the community because other people’s attitudes towards them. For instance, some elders have prejudices against them and complain when teenagers engage in their own activities. Many people think that teenagers go to the park to drink alcohol, smoke, and waste their time. The park is a public space where teenagers feel free to go; they know there is appropriate behaviour to follow. Niza Park has a security guard who is very familiar with the community and the park. He said:

_I have to take care of the park and the houses around it…when teenagers come I need to make sure they are not doing anything wrong and if they are I must tell the parents…I know most of the people from this block and I can tell where some teenagers live and who their parents are._

Having a person who can control these situations in the park presents a good opportunity to encourage the use of the park among teenagers, get them more
involved with the community and accept them as an important group in the community, without prejudice.

The fact that some people, especially elders, are sometimes irritated by teenage activity, shows that this park is generally quiet and tranquil and teenage activity can be sometimes disruptive to some people. It also shows that different age groups perceive and identify with the park in specific ways. In this case it is understandable that the park is meant to be a peaceful place for elders but at the same time the park needs to become a place for teenagers to interact in a healthy environment. All users need to become tolerant with different groups of users.

There were some couples of young lovers looking for isolated places in the park to cuddle. These couples show that the park provides space for young people to develop their friendships and romantic relationships. These interactions are part of the development of teenagers into adults. An adult mentioned:

\[
\text{I have good memories of this park, especially that I met my first boyfriend here when we were both teenagers...now I live overseas but whenever I visit the park I remember the years I spent here when I was younger.}
\]

It seems that people in this community, including teenagers, are jealous about the park. They do not want people from outside the neighbourhood to use the park. However, they know that they cannot avoid visitors in the park because it is public space. Teenagers are not strong about the fact that they do not like strangers much, but some mentioned:

\[
\text{Some people from other neighbourhoods do not take care of the park and leave rubbish, even I have heard that there has been thieves caught hanging around in the park.}
\]

Despite comments like this, teenagers think that the park is a good environment to interact with other people and meet with neighbours. Teenagers are open to meet people and they did not specify if they have identified park users that do not live in
the area. For that reason, comments like this are more part of the general perception of
the community rather than conclusions from their own experiences.

6.2.3 Adults

There were 32 adults interviewed in both phases of fieldwork. These interviews show
that almost half of them, about 15 interviewees, tend to go to the park with their
children and family. The other half tend to go to the park alone or with one
companion, this companion is either a relative or a friend.

When adults go to the park with their children their main purpose is to supervise the
children and often play with them or help them in the playground. When playing or
supervising children, adults from Niza showed a relaxed attitude. They were giving
instructions, smiling and cheering with the children, helping them with the facilities or
talking to other adults while supervising children. Observations of people using the
playground (families) are less than the observations of passive recreation. There are
75 records for passive recreation and 36 records for playground activity in both
phases of research. Observations show that despite many people think that they are
going to the park to take their children; they are also going for passive recreation.
Passive recreation is the most frequent and repeated activity developed in the park by
teenagers, adults and elders. Figure 6.5 shows the relaxed atmosphere of the park.

Figure 6.5. While children play, adults supervise them and relax
When people go alone or with one companion, usually another adult, they tend to engage in activities such as observing, talking, walking and sitting on benches. Adults’ interactions are generally tranquil and relaxed. In some cases they meet with the guard and talk mainly about neighbourhood matters. The guard serves as a communication channel for neighbours because he is aware of most of the issues that concern neighbours in Niza. His interaction with neighbours is very frequent. As he mentioned:

*I know most neighbours, they come to talk to me sometimes, they are like my bosses, so I pay attention to what they need and answer their requests… some are very friendly.*

When adults go to the park they usually greet other neighbours but rarely talk to them for long. Many people just want to be on their own without having any interruptions. It appears that adults using Niza Park prefer their independence and regard highly their privacy, even in this public space. Perhaps this is the reason why this park has some features that imply some privatisation of this public space. It is possible that because Niza users highly regard their privacy, they sometimes become suspicious about users from other neighbourhoods. For example there is a fence that separates the park from the main road (see Figure 6.6)

![Figure 6.6. Fence and thick vegetation towards the main road](image)

Several participants expressed distrust of park users who come from other neighbourhoods. Many adults in Niza mentioned this distrust in different comments. However, it appears that in many cases park users cannot specifically show who are from the neighbourhood and who are not. The neighbourhood representative said that
people who live there take care of the facilities but with visitors she cannot be sure. The security guard expressed a similar opinion saying that if the person was not from the neighbourhood it could be thief and he had to be suspicious of all their movements. In an interview an adult said:

*Some days the park is very dirty, it is because people that are not from here don’t take care of the park…* I have seen conflicts between people that you can tell are not from the neighbourhood…*the park belongs to everybody but because not all people have civility that is why we had to put the fence, otherwise there would be unscrupulous people inside the park and maybe the park wouldn’t exist now without the fence.*

Niza Park users strongly believe that the park would be better if only people from the neighbourhood used it. Another participant said that she thinks the park belongs to the neighbourhood and she celebrated that they put the fence on the west border to avoid that everybody gets inside the park. Residents of the neighbourhood acknowledge that the park is public for everybody in the city but they fear to have undesired visitors.

From our observations it is very difficult to identify who is a visitor and who is a neighbour because their dress code and appearance are almost the same. Interestingly, in street interviews from both phases more than 50% classified themselves as visitors and not inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In an interview, one person expressed with some bitterness that the park belongs to the whole city and both rich and poor people can use it:

*Yes, of course, the park is for everybody for the rich and the poor, for everyone…we [citizens] had to pay taxes for the parks project…the change in this park is that these rich people [pejorative] are not letting us play here, they complain and show that they do not like our presence.*

This person mentioned that she is from a nearby neighbourhood but the parks in her neighbourhood are always crowded and her neighbourhood is of a different socioeconomic level. Observations showed that they seemed respectful of the park and other people and they were not causing disturbances. At the same time none
complained to them at any moment. However, if she made these comments it could be
either that she had an incident before or perhaps she sensed that visitors from other
neighbourhoods were less than welcomed. Most of the visitors from other
neighbourhoods mentioned that some people do not keep the park clean but they do
when they visit the park. Another participant said that she works in the area and that
residents of the neighbourhood do not use the park, it is too quiet compared with other
parks.

6.2.4 Elders

Elders are significant users of this park. The security guard and the neighbourhood
representative agreed that a high number of users in this park are elders. They tend to
go to the park with their partners or relatives, a small number go to the park alone.
Some of them go the park with their grandchildren perhaps taking the role of nannies
or carers. These elders who go to the park with grandchildren, pay more attention to
children’s activities and the facilities they use than to their personal leisure. Elders,
who go to the park with their partners, go mainly for relaxation and to sit down and
look around. A senior commented:

*This park means peace to us… we come here to rest and look around, talk and chat
between us or with neighbours and walk around.*

When elders go alone to the park the activities they develop are similar to the ones
they engage in, when they are with others. Many also go to the park to walk their pets
and in that case they may just walk around with their pets or sometimes have
conversation with the security guard or other neighbours. Because the activities they
develop their relationships with other elders are generally very positive; their
relationships with adults are also positive, they like to engage in conversations,
especially conversations of general interest of the neighbours such as the conditions of
the park or community issues. Elders relate to children in a special way. As mentioned
earlier, some elders take the role of children carers and in that case their main purpose
to go to the park is take the children to play. When elders go alone or with other
adults, children are still important for elders because the presence of children makes
the park an active and happy place that elders enjoy very much. A couple of seniors
commented:
I feel very good when I come to the park because I can play with the kids, I clear my thoughts and then I stay happy the whole day because sports are lively.

This park represents entertainment and I am very happy when I come here, the landscape is great and children enliven the place.

Elders consider that children are important users of the park and they like to share the park with them, however, with teenagers it seems there are some tensions. Teenagers perceive that some elders do not like their presence in the park because sometimes elders seem annoyed by teenagers. A senior interviewee said,

The downside was when there were bonfires, because they will be awake until next day and make noise. This was very bad and annoying to neighbours.

These types of activities were carried out by teenagers, these parties included singing, drinking and probably smoking, sometimes they could be disruptive some other times they could be calm. However, these parties are now forbidden in the park. Elders mentioned some sports activities but they did not comment on young people participating. It appears that there is some distance and probably tension between elders and teenagers. Observations show that elders prefer to go to the park when the park is quiet, early in the morning or before noon perhaps when teens are at school. This aspect can be considered as normal because teenagers and adults have different needs in terms of recreation and leisure. However, it is a potential disturbance for the wellbeing of the community if there is not negotiation and agreement between them. Architectural design of the park could contribute to decrease these tensions, with adequate facilities for different age groups. In general this park is very quiet so elders feel at ease when using it and the landscape and accessibility are highly valued by this age group. Elders enjoy the fact that there are benches and paths to walk around and relax (see Figure 6.7).
6.3 Interactions between people and the park: A natural retreat in the middle of the city

This section focuses on the perception of people about the physical characteristics of the park. The park may affect users’ behaviours in different ways, and the experience of being in the context of recreation in a defined space may also influence users’ perceptions and behaviours. This part of the analysis acknowledges that the space of the park is the context, in which people engage in recreation and relate to the closer community. Moreover this analysis supports the claims from the literature review and the methodological claims that the space of the park, the surroundings, and the specific elements that constitute the park, influence users’ behaviours in the park and are a significant part of their experience of public space and recreation.

6.3.1 Children

In 2002, 5 drawings were made. They included clouds but only two of them pictured the sun. All drawings represent daytime none of them make any reference to night
conditions. Children use the park mainly at daytime and observations did not record children using the park at night. In 2004, four children out of the 10 who made drawings, pictured clouds and one drew a smiling sun. Drawings from the second phase of fieldwork are less detailed than the one from 2002. The weather of the city facilitates outdoor activities. In Niza Park, in two phases of fieldwork the temperature varied from 10º C to 25º C. Observations from 2002 made in August show a slightly colder weather because it is a windy month. For both, children and adults, sunny days are preferred because the city tends to be cold. It is common that if it starts raining park users will immediately leave the park so the days of more activity is when is sunny.

The five drawings from 2002 show grass and the park covered with vegetation. Two drawings make a clear distinction of a cherry tree (see Figure 6.8). Two drawings focus on the playground and the three incorporate the playground with other facilities of the park. In drawings from 2004, six focused on the playground and the other four focused on the vegetation of the park, sports facilities and elements such as benches. Two of these drawings picture a water feature that does not exist in the park. Perhaps they would like to have a water feature in the park. Three children drew a bird flying in the park and another one drew a dog. Observations show that this park is pet friendly. This acknowledgement of the natural life of the park may mean that children see the park as an ecosystem full of natural life.
From interviews and observation it is clear that the cherry tree is important for park users. It has been in the park for many years, it produces seasonal fruit that children and adults enjoy picking. The security guard acknowledged that many people are aware of the cherry tree and like to go there to take some fruit. Some interviewees mentioned:

People should not pick up fruits because it is forbidden, but they still do it.

I like to pick up some cherries, and the kids love it too, when they are in season.

We do it like a game (pick up cherries), kids love it… I really like that we have this tree.
Observations showed a nanny who was picking cherries from the tree with a child and a couple of elderly people who did the same. The second phase of fieldwork there were no records involving the cherry tree. In these drawings one can observe that they think that the park is mainly its natural features, and the playground. The trees seem to be important for children and the life around them, like birds. Only one child drew a house. For these children this park is less urban than other parks in the city. They tend to see the park more as a landscape than a place to actively use because one of the drawings shows two children sitting in benches and not playing in the playground, as it would be the expected situation. Few children drew others playing in playground despite the fact that most of them drew the playground with great level of detail. Figures 6.9 and 6.10 show the appearance of one of the playgrounds and the way a child represented it.

Figure 6.9. Playground 1 Niza Park.
Two drawings from 2002 made by the eldest children are precise on the location of elements and have a complete picture of the park. They both drew the sports court, playground and some benches. One child drew the security guard’s kiosk. More than acknowledging the presence of the security it is about locating all physical elements from the park in the way they are organised. In drawings from 2004 the view of the park is a bit fragmented but again the eldest children represented other features, such as sports courts not only the playground.

The environment of the park influences children in various ways. Some attach high regard to the playground to the extent that for some children the playground is the whole of the park. They also attach high value to the natural elements of the park such as vegetation. They see the park as a natural space isolated from elements of the urban structure such as roads and traffic. Children in Niza also see that this park is tranquil and high sport activity is not desirable. For children this park is a place for games and entertainment. They also see it as the place to see plants and animals, to interact with the nature, take sunshine and breathe clean air. Figure 6.11 shows a drawing where trees and natural elements are very important.
6.3.2 Teenagers

Some teenagers said that the park is tranquil, pleasant and comfortable because it has appropriate facilities. A few youth noted,

*I like this park because it has a fence, which protects from the outside.*

*It (the fence) helps to keep the park quiet and safe.*

It appears that many groups in the community share this perception. Many people in the neighbourhood think the fence maintains their park as a safe place (see Figure 6.12). It is a general belief among Bogotá citizens that fences are tools for maintaining safety in public space. There are studies and reports that show otherwise (Mockus, 2002; Saldarriaga, 2001). The city administrators attempted to change that mentality with appropriate design in some areas of the city, but coverage was not complete. However, they lacked consultation and for that reason many people including Niza community have not changed that way of thinking that fences are the only way to
ensure security. Teenagers believe that fences in the park protect them from crime; this perception may be influenced by adult’s perceptions.

Figure 6.12. Fence raised by neighbours

The teenagers interviewed mentioned that one of the most important characteristics of the park is its natural environment. They regard the park as an area with good environmental quality because it has many trees and vegetation. Some teenagers said:

*The natural environment here is very pretty.*

*The main road is very polluting, noisy and dangerous and for that reason the fence is an important isolating those bad things around the park.*

*The park means happiness because of the whistle from the birds.*

*People from here take good care of the natural environment in this park... this park is better than many others in the city.*

*The natural environment of the park is what I like the most from here.*
These comments indicate that teenagers have high appreciation for the natural environmental features of this park. It seems park users in Niza have a strong culture for maintaining these environmental qualities in good condition. However, the condition of the facilities is not adequate as observations and street interviews with teenagers confirm. Some teenagers said:

*The floor of the basketball court is very uneven and we cannot play there.*

*The basketball court needs to be fixed… the soccer field is not good either.*

Teenagers identified that the natural elements of the park are taken care of regularly, through lawn mowing and gardening, but the facilities such as basketball court, soccer field, volleyball net and playgrounds do not have the same care. This fact shows that the park is oriented to passive recreation more than to sport activities and that may represent a lack of opportunities for sports for teenagers.

The park is an L shape and there is a small area that is hardly visible from other parts of the park. It makes surveillance difficult and for that reason some neighbours installed security cameras in this area. That shape facilitates that some people could go to that area to hide and do wrongdoings; some people think this area is a potential danger for the park and the houses nearby (see Figure 6.13). This problem could be overcome if there was some architectural design implemented to the park instead of increasing the use of security cameras, fences and isolating barriers. The security guard confirmed that sometimes youth go there to smoke marihuana or drink alcohol in the park, causing security problems.

Figure 6.13. The least used area of the park
6.3.3 Adults

The interactions of adults and the park are influenced by social, historic and design contexts. Niza had suburban origin but because of the growth of the city it is now part of its urban structure. Originally the neighbourhood was conceived as suburban, for that reason the park was considered a natural environment without much human intervention. The rapid growth of the city influenced the neighbourhood negatively with new roads and high traffic congestion. These roads affected the design and morphology of the park and the neighbours needed to fence the limit between the park and the roads in order to maintain the original tranquil atmosphere of their park. The park is pleasant because it is a natural space in a highly urbanised city that has maintained its vegetation and natural elements for many years. The vegetation is one of the most attractive qualities of the park and its low use contributes to the tranquillity and natural atmosphere of the park.

Adults consider the park as an ecosystem, or as the neighbourhood representative said:

\[
\text{This park originally had a rural atmosphere, now it is like an oasis because there is not another area with the natural features of this park in the surroundings... trees are very important in this park, they are the most beautiful attraction of this park.}
\]

Adults perceive this park as being a good natural environment with a lot of vegetation and people want to maintain it in that way. As the neighbourhood representative commented:

\[
\text{Sometime ago people from the botanic gardens came to cut non-native trees and plant native trees instead... that was a city project they did in many places...There was a lot of opposition from neighbours, they complained to the point that they could not cut some of the trees...they (the trees) are still marked to be cut sometime.}
\]

The neighbourhood representative showed me the trees that are still marked to be cut. This park is also a remembrance from older times when the neighbourhood had suburban characteristics and it did not have the traffic and congestion that has now.
For that reason neighbours are very proud of the park; this pride may be transmitted to children since they represented these features in their drawings.

Observations show that the actual state of the park could be categorised as semiprivate. It is clear that the park is public space of the city and everybody acknowledged it. But the shape of the park contributes to place it off limits to other neighbourhoods. Moreover, the way it is used show elements of privatisation. For instance the institutional signs of the park come from the neighbourhood association and not the city administration (see Figure 6.14). The first message says that the neighbourhood is exclusively residential and people must consult regulations before renting or buying. The second message says that the park is for everybody so please take care of it. The third message is asking people to pick up their dog’s waste. These types of messages make the park look different from the majority of the parks in the city. Another feature that differentiates Niza Park is that it has 3 kiosks. One is a toilet for the guards, and the other two are little offices for the security guards. Two constructions around the park are apartments building; their design neglected the park completely and because of that they installed security cameras and protective wire. The other element that shows the informal privatisation of the park is the fence built around two of the limits of the park.

![Figure 6.14. Messages from neighbourhood association.](image)

There are two crowded roads that affect the park negatively with noise and air pollution. People from the neighbourhood built a fence facing these main roads. Several interviewees stated:

*The fence helps to keep away undesirable outsiders.*
It (fence) protects the park from thieves and homeless.

The fence keeps the park safe and tranquil.

It is important to maintain that fence there, otherwise the park would lose its good characteristics.

Niza Park is easily accessible from inside the neighbourhood. The fence and some bush in the west limit prevent access to the park from this side, which is considered the limit of the neighbourhood as well. The shape and urban physical elements that influence the park impede other citizens to see and access the park. The neighbourhood representative stated:

I know fences are not allowed, but we don't want to get rid of this fence because it protects us…most neighbours agree with keeping the fence… we are happy with that and we know of examples were fences were taken away and these public spaces became no one lands and lost all good qualities.

The neighbourhood representative highlighted that the park has design problems; observations corroborate this fact. Since the architectural design of the park was from the seventies, the park now displays a fragmented shape with facilities that are not properly placed and external influences that affect the park negatively. The neighbourhood representative said:

People use only one part of the park, the other is abandoned… this is due to the park's design problems.

The representative thinks that many of these problems could be overcome with a new and more updated architectural design for the park but the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project did not provided a new design for this specific park. The project addressed its work to the poorest areas of the city because these areas had greater urban problems than the wealthier areas of the city. One of the most noticeable design problems is in the playgrounds. They are old and the way they are attached to the ground presents dangers for children such as dangerous edges and hard floors (see
Figure 6.15). Apart from the playground, there are also some design problems related to the limits of boundaries of the park.

![Figure 6.15. Some design problems in Niza Park](image)

All facilities have been in general well maintained but currently they are quite old. The playgrounds were built over ten years ago and the park preserves the same architectural design of their beginning in the late seventies. The community may have resources and opportunities to renovate the facilities of the park. Perhaps they have not renovated the park because they like it to have the natural green look that the park currently has. The intervention of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project in Niza was limited to the work from the Botanic Garden on trees and the placement of benches and rubbish bins (see Figure 6.16). It does not mean that this park was neglected by the project; the improvements conducted in Niza corresponded to the evaluation of the conditions of Niza Park by ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project.

![Figure 6.16. Benches before and after ‘Parks for learning how to live’ and rubbish bin.](image)
The effect of trees, vegetation, birds and pets seems to have a positive impact upon Niza Park users. Several interviewees find Niza Park as one of the few natural well-preserved environments in the middle of the city. House owners around the park are happy to have it there because it represents significant landscape to observe from their windows and a special surrounding in this residential quiet neighbourhood. A park user commented:

*I got very excited in my first visit to the park, I came to see the house I wanted to buy... then I saw the park and I realised the possibility of coming for exercise all the time. It [the park] is attractive because it gives more value to the properties around it...the most positive aspect is the existence of the trees and nice natural environment...I take care of the tree that is in front of my house, I put fertiliser to it and take care of that tree specifically.*

This quote highlights the relationship between the physical characteristics of the park and its contribution to property value. It is very important for residents of wealthy neighbourhoods because their houses constitute an important part of their wealth. The fact that the park adds value to properties and makes them more attractive to the market is a significant value for the residents of Niza.

### 6.3.4 Elders

Niza Park has a defined character that is shared by most people from the different age groups. This character is that Niza Park is a relaxing, great natural landscape in the middle of the city. Its vegetation is highly regarded as well as its tranquillity. It appears that this type of public space is excellent for elders since their needs in terms of leisure are relaxation, tranquillity and security as several of them stated. A senior commented:

*I’ve been coming here for over 11 years, at the beginning was a kind of little jungle, but now it is taken care and the natural environment is very enjoyable... I love the view from my apartment.*
Several elders and adults mentioned that the park’s natural environment is very important to them for various reasons. The previous comment talks about how the park represents an attractive view from residences surrounding the park. Others mentioned that this park contributes to their houses’ market value. These approaches to the park are significant to the character of the park but they take distance from the actual use of it. On the other hand, elders with a more active approach to the park see the park as a kind of oasis as the neighbourhood representative stated:

*For us the park is tranquillity, relaxation and peace, it satisfies our needs as well as children’s needs… it is very nice because of the good arborisation and maintenance. It is the prettiest park in the area.*

This park is marvellous and it is a few steps from the house… I am fascinated with this park because it is very important to have recreation in a big city like this… its vegetation is the best feature and it is important to preserve it as it is.

These two approaches to the park, as a landscape, and as a relaxation retreat, correspond to the character of the park of being a special natural environment immersed in an urban structure. This character has developed and consolidated through the years and because of the spatial practice and urban public life that users have created in there. The consolidated vegetation of Niza Park contributes to elder’s wellbeing. A number of participants commented that sometimes the playground serves to people doing therapy or exercises for working out. Figure 6.17 shows the blend of consolidated vegetation with playground and other elements of the park.

*Figure 6.17. Playground Niza Park*
This character matches perfectly elders’ needs, tranquil environment, relaxation and peace are the characteristics of the space and they as well are what elders are looking for in terms of leisure and recreation. Observations show that the physical environment of Niza Park, due to its location, vegetation and natural characteristics, is a space with therapeutic and restorative nature. The physical environment of Niza Park seems to be an excellent scenario for exercising, therapies and restorative activities. Observations recorded a few elders and less mobile people engaged in therapies with health professionals. A few elders mentioned that they go to the park for exercising by taking walks in order to improve their health. One elderly interviewee said:

\[ \text{I come here for a bit of a walk or jog early in the morning, I love the morning breeze and the whistles of birds, you come here and you can breath nature} \]

Restorative environments is a theme that has been investigated recently; despite the fact that it is not the central topic of this research, is important to acknowledge that Niza Park is considered by various of its users as a therapeutic, relaxing and restorative environment. This is expressed in the way they use the park and the purposes why they go there.

6.4 Activities and uses: When spatial practice constructs public space

Parks are dynamic places; they offer opportunities for people to develop a high number of activities that enrich their lives and for that reason they are important to all residents. Uses and activities in parks are not only statistical indicators; they are meaningful part of people’s life thus are important to identify and analyse. Activities in and uses of the park are core to the concept of spatial practice. Spatial practice has been discussed under many angles in scholarly research, this specific analysis extracts
particular elements that constitute spatial practice in order to understand how it occurs in this park and contribute to the general interpretation of this concept.

6.4.1 Children

Drawings from 2002 mainly show playground activity, one drawing pictures a child playing in the swing; another pictures two children sitting on benches. These drawings show that passive recreation is an important part of the use of this park. Other children drew the playground with great detail. It may imply that they use it to the extent to be quite familiar with it and recognise the playground specific characteristics. However, the drawings of the playground do not include children in them. The fact that children drew the playground without children may show that despite the fact these children are familiar with the playground and the park in general they may recognise that there are not many users in this park (see Figure 6.18).

Figure 6.18. Drawing of the playground by a 9 year old child
One child acknowledged the existence of passive recreation; this is the second most important activity in the park according to the observation records of both phases of fieldwork in this park. In 2002 there were over 30 records for passive recreation, and many of them do not include children’s activity, however, this child represented this activity in her drawing.

Drawings from 2004 do not show activities as such, however, two children drew the sports courts but not the playground, this may be because these children were 11 and 10 years old, a bit grown up to use the playground. Another 11 year old drew mainly the playground but in a second level or in a far perspective he drew the sports courts. Another child drew both courts and playground at the same level as the playground (see Figure 6.19) and the other four focused only in the playground. This shows that the main activity in this park is playing in the playground and in a second level would be sports and passive recreation as two of them included benches in their drawings. Moreover these drawings show that children from different ages also have different preferences in terms of activities and use of park and its facilities. In 2004 observations there are 40 records for passive activities; passive recreation will be discussed in the following sections as this is not a main activity for children, however, it is interesting that they highlight this activity in some drawings because children recognised that other users of the park go for passive recreation and that it is an important characteristic of Niza Park.
As stated earlier, in the drawings from 2004 a child acknowledged the presence of a dog. This is another important activity in this park, as many people have pets and they walk their dogs at different times of the day. Observations from 2004 recorded about 15 pet related activities, which in many cases can be similar to passive recreation as people will walk their dogs, or sit down to watch them run and sometimes do some pet training, again this activity will be discussed in the following sections.

The lack of people in children’s drawings shows that some children acknowledge the low use of this park. At the same time drawings reflect the high regard Niza users give to passive recreation. The neighbourhood representative, a woman who has been member of the neighbourhood association for about 16 years; she said:
This park is mainly used by adult people and elders, that is because this
neighbourhood has older residents, there are not many children living here, most
children are now grown up.

Park use in Niza may therefore reflect that the neighbourhood is aging. However,
there is no statistic data to verify this claim. Observations show a great number of
adults and elders using the park, it seems that the neighbourhood is aging because the
same people have been living there for long time. However, there has been recent
change in housing with the building of apartment blocks nearby Niza Park. This factor
may inject the park with new users of different ages.

6.4.2 Teenagers

Two teenagers said that they go to the park to practice sports and games. Some
teenagers said:

*I only come to the park for the Karate training... I learned about it somewhere else
and since then I have been participating in the training in the weekends.*

*I mainly come here to walk my dog, I play with my dog and relax... sometimes I talk
to people and I like when is sunny to take sunshine.*

*When I come with my school friends we write songs and make jokes... for
fun...sometimes we have a smoke and we just hang around here.*

In this park passive activities such as walking, talking, care of pets among others, are
more popular than sports. Sports occurred especially in the weekends and they are
informal. Interviewees stated that they have seen groups who train for soccer,
basketball and volleyball but they do not belong to these groups. During weekend
observations, the karate team was always there and the team include teenagers,
children and adults over 20 years old. Pet related activities are also a priority for some
youth (see Figure 6.20).
The trends of activities from this park are that it is highly regarded as a space for passive recreation. Even the teenagers that may be the most active age group using the park practice various passive activities instead of sports. The neighbourhood seems to have built a long lasting culture for passive recreation in this park. Moreover since this park is located in a high-income area of the city. It may be common for these teenagers to belong to sports teams at school or in sports clubs. In general they may have more accessibility to sports than teenagers from low-income areas because their parents can afford to pay for training, uniforms, memberships and other costs.

These teenagers acknowledged that the neighbours have organised cultural activities such as food fairs, catholic mass at the park, yoga and activities for elderly people. Food fairs are very popular as activities in the community, their main aim is fundraising but another effect of these fairs is they contribute to establish links, connections and friendships among neighbours from all ages. Despite the fact that teenagers acknowledged the existence of sports, cultural and social activities in the park; they would like to have better facilities, especially sports facilities. As well as they would like to have more ways of recreation. Some of the comments were:

Recreational facilities for children are good but for young people and adults it isn’t.

I would like to participate in concerts in the park, they would be attractive to young people.
More cultural and sports activities would be good for me.

More activities for getting people together… that we could meet more young people and join our group.

There appears to be a lack of activities for teenagers. It may be related to the under use of sports facilities. Teenagers may enjoy or be more attracted to active activities and if they were implemented in the park the problem of teenagers wondering around could be overcome. They need more opportunity to get involved with the community and participate more. The previous comments from teenagers also show that they can contribute greatly to the improvement of the park because they have relevant observations to make about the use of the park and how they are involved or not involved in activities. At this age young people have special needs in terms of recreation. It is widely accepted that when youth are involved in social gatherings and specially sports they are more likely to be away from drugs and other influences that can threat their life. For that reason the local park is a significant environment that teenagers can use to improve their lifestyles.

6.4.3 Adults

Originally the area where the park now is had been used to dispose of construction waste, but after some neighbours got organised they started to conduct civic activities to encourage residents to protect the park. The first activities were: Tree day and Children’s day. In the first activity neighbours were invited to plant trees, and do some gardening in the park. The second activity was to encourage children to use the park, and to encourage sense of belonging to the park. These activities were solely conducted by the neighbourhood, the city administration had no involvement at the time. The neighbourhood representative mentioned the importance of such activities:

Children were included in these activities by planting flowers and trees, it was important that they acquire an ecologic consciousness. We as parents wanted to teach them that in the nice environment we had.

This neighbourhood was planned since its origins and for that reason the land designated to the park was available from the beginning; however, the park wasn’t
designed and constructed until residents took action. The image of the park was natural; it was not yet affected by human activity. Children from the neighbourhood started playing in this environment, they used to catch frogs and play with animals and among the plants. As a neighbours’ initiative they put together some money and started to build facilities in the park such as benches and playgrounds. The fact that children from the neighbourhood started to use the area of the park as a place for play, facilitated the early and rapid construction of this park initiated by neighbours. It appears that children are the principal motor for the functioning of Niza Park. The park was rapidly consolidated in order to fulfil children’s needs. Most adults state that they go to the park or they contribute to maintain the park with money or help because the park is important for children.

The park’s security guard said:

*People practice many activities, sometimes soccer and basketball, there are also karate classes and therapies for elder or disable people… there are sometimes exercises for pregnant women.*

Observation records show that traditional park activities are common in this park; activities such as playing, usually in the playground, sports such as soccer and basketball, and passive recreation such as sunbathing, talking, walking (pets), and sitting down. However, in this park, passive recreation and pet related activities are much more common than games and sports. Niza Park has a contemplative, quiet nature, it seems it is the desire of several neighbours, or at least most influential neighbours want to maintain the park with this range of activities. A participant noted:

*This park should not have sports courts, it should be used only for leisure activities such as walking, relaxing, contemplating the nature.*

Another interviewee noted:

*I help with the maintenance of the park by keeping this little garden, I come everyday to take care of the flowers and plants I planted in this corner… it makes the park look more beautiful.*
This activity confirms that park users have high regard for the natural elements of this park. The character of this park is directly linked with the quality and consolidation of the natural elements of the park. Furthermore they have not attempted strongly to recover the sports facilities of the park that need repair and maintenance (see Figure 6.21).

![Figure 6.21. Maintenance problems with the basketball court](image)

On the other hand, there were several interviewees who repeated that the condition of the sports courts was poor and they should be fixed so people could play sports. The poor condition of the sport courts has remained like that for years. It seems that the sport courts are the least important facilities in this park. However, it is also clear that despite the fact that neighbours usually have the opportunity to practice sports outside the park, a neighbourhood park needs to have facilities for every type of recreation in order to ensure high use, and high involvement to achieve social sustainability of the park. Observations also showed that younger adults are more willing to practice sports or play with the children and teenagers than the older adults.

One interesting activity that a participant noted was a dog show. He said:

*It was a very good activity, there were stalls, and dogs skills were tested... this is the only special or different activity that I have seen in here...there were a lot of people interested and a vet clinic was involved in the organisation of it, I believe.*
Observations recorded that pet related activities are very important in this park. Many people go to the park only for this purpose. The security guard also noted that there is a dog trainer who works in the park sometimes. He also commented:

_We have had many problems with dog’s waste, people sometimes don’t clean that… there is a law in the police code that enforces cleaning dogs’ waste but maybe people don’t know it… they could be prosecuted for that… many dog owners clean the waste but other simply don’t care._

Education in regards to dog’s waste management is very important because it can cause hygienic problems as a recent study from the health secretary of Bogotá showed. This study highlights that the impact of this problem affects the city negatively and that there is lack of education and consciousness from pet owners. Pet related activities are very common in Niza Park. People from all ages visit the park to play or walk their pets and despite that there are messages about waste management and the community mentioned their awareness in the interviews, there are still people who do not comply to pick up their pet’s waste. Observations recorded 27 dog-related activities in Niza in both periods of fieldwork. Moreover there is a dog that actually lives in the park and neighbours take care of this dog, the next figure (see Figure 6.22) shows the dog’s house that neighbours bought for it.

Figure 6.22. House for the dog that lives in the park.
6.4.4 Elders

The activities that most elders engage in Niza Park are observing, sitting in benches, walking around, walk pets and chat with neighbours, relatives or friends. All elders agree that observing and contemplating the park is one of the activities they enjoy the most especially when it is sunny and warm. Observations reported activities that people did not mentioned in interviews, they were therapies and exercises led by health professionals. Some seniors mentioned:

*I love to come here when is sunny, I walk my dog and sometimes talk to other pet owners.*

*Recreation for children is good but for us there is not much... we come here to rest and relax, seeking for tranquillity.*

*I like playing basket and other games with my family, I enjoy sports because they help to improve fitness.*

Elders also have high regard for community activities that occur sporadically during a year. These activities are appreciated because they contribute to reunite the community and the attendance is high. Moreover these activities are adequate for all age groups. Elders mentioned activities such as Mass, food festivals, dog exhibitions among others. Some of their comments were:

*All people need to contribute to make this park more familiar and cosy… I like food festivals and Mass service when it happens because that makes the park cosy.*

*There were people planting trees, it is a good thing but it would have been better if the community participated.*

Several elders are people-oriented or they would like to experience a stronger sense of community in the neighbourhood. They think communitarian activities are the glue that could improve sense of belonging and community ties. It is true that this type of activities will contribute to increase community ties, however, their organisation planning and execution require a lot of work. It seems people want to have this type
of activities but they did not mention contributing to the planning and preparation of these activities. This situation of people demanding activities but withdrawing when some sort of commitment is required is a common problem in neighbourhoods across the city. The neighbourhood representative mentioned this problem as one of the biggest challenges in community work.

6.5 Administrative and socio-political issues: Behind the scenes of playing and relaxing

This section discusses issues that arise from use of the park but that involve implications beyond the use itself. For instance commercial activity, or maintenance issues occur in the park and they incorporate processes that extend to other domains usually the administrative or managerial domain. This part of the analysis acknowledges that the existence and continuous evolution of the park requires processes and actions that are not directly related to recreation but that are vital for the sustainability of the park. The way this processes and actions occur are analysed below. They provide tools for understanding what is required in the park, the processes that are efficient and the attitudes that contribute or impede the evolution of the park.

6.5.1 Children

Maintenance of the facilities of the park, especially the playgrounds, is the issue that affect children directly. Observation records show that the two playgrounds from Niza Park are old, they have had maintenance but they have a number of design problems in regards to children’s safety. The floor is made of concrete and has edgy ends near the slide and the bars. The hard floor and the inappropriate edges could cause injuries to children. Some adults acknowledged this problem and showed concern about children’s safety when using playgrounds. An interviewee commented:

The park is pretty but I think the playground is a bit dangerous because of those finishing parts on the floor… I always check that my son don’t get hurt there… they should be remade.
Comments like this demonstrate that park users have knowledge from experience; this knowledge could be taken into account during design processes. This example shows the importance of consultation processes when restoring or designing park facilities. However, there is a significant gap between expression of this local knowledge and participation in planning and design. The current condition of the playground presents some risks for children who play there as observations showed (see Figure 6.23). Several parents and carers acknowledged this problem but there are not efficient mechanisms to improve these conditions. It appears that some small repairs were implemented but they are not appropriate in terms of children’s safety. Parents highlighted this fact in some interviews.

![Figure 6.23. Ill repair of children’s playground](image)

Security is a significant issue when children are involved. Often in cities such as Bogotá, parents do not allow their children to go to the street or park alone and many times they do not have time to take children to the park. However, observations of this park showed that a few times there were children using the park without parental supervision. It may have happened because the park has a security guard all day and night. The security guard said:

*Children don’t come here alone, always with their parents.*
The guard did not acknowledge that some children might stay in the park without parents; this may show that the observation of the children unsupervised is an uncommon event. In general children are very comfortable when using the park and their parents or carers take the time to accompany them when going to the park. Nobody mentioned any situation in regards to children’s security apart from the common dangers of falling or getting injured while playing. For that reason this park appears to fulfil people’s expectations in regards to security.

6.5.2 Teenagers

The maintenance of the park is an administrative issue of great significance. In Niza it appears that the neighbourhood association has high involvement in the maintenance and the city administration has little direct involvement. Some of the teenagers interviewed, and who live in the neighbourhood, believed that the park is maintained with the money that the neighbours pay for those purposes. The information signs in the park indicate that the neighbourhood association is in charge as they provide instructions to use the park on behalf of the neighbourhood association. Some teenagers identified that the neighbourhood association maintains the park and takes care lawn mowing, cleaning, security and general repairs. Some interviewees had knowledge about the project of parks as a city initiative but they could not see the initiative implemented in this park, except from the allocation of some benches and rubbish bins.

The majority of teenagers interviewed commented that the sports fields are in bad condition. Some youth noted:

*I would like that the sports courts were fixed.*

*The park satisfies my expectations but the courts are small, I would like them to be bigger.*

*It needs more care of the sports courts.*

Sports courts need repair and maintenance (see Figure 6.24). It appears that the high regard of the park’s passive recreation generated a lack of care for the sports fields
they are simply not a priority. It appears that the priorities in this park are security and the maintenance of the natural environment. If that is the case, Niza Park seems to be rejecting the potential of sports in this park. Sport is a good tool to involve teenagers in healthy activities that they enjoy in the neighbourhood.

In terms of cleaning and maintenance teenagers commented:

We have to pick pet’s waste, take care of the fence and not make any paintings with air paints.

We should clean our dog’s waste, use bins for rubbish and not to light bon fires.

I take care of the park picking any rubbish I see or I have and the waste from my dog.

Teenagers said that some people do not keep the park clean when they use it. Some teenagers blamed the visitors or outsiders to be the ones who leave rubbish in the park. It could be a misconception because observations showed that most users of the park seem to use the park in the same way regardless if they are residents or visitors in the neighbourhood. They also raised the issue of dogs’ waste, it seems to be an
important issue in this park because the teenagers who do not have pets complaint about the problem. The teenagers who have pets said that they always take care of cleaning their dog’s waste. One of the most important uses of the park, pet walks, generated a problem that needs to be controlled, and the community needs more education on this issue.

Teenagers are aware of rules and regulations to use the park. They mentioned cleaning rules and rules regarding dogs’ waste as mentioned above, however, one made an interesting comment:

I reckon that there is not allowed to smoke marihuana, there is no sign but that very obvious… once a cop took me to the station because I was smoking [he didn’t specify what].

This comment corroborates the story of the neighbourhood representative and the guard in regards to youth smoking marihuana. Despite the fact that the teen did not said that he was smoking marihuana the fact that he was taken by a police officer evidences that he indeed did it, or may have some marihuana with him. Interestingly this person recognised the park as a very tranquil place and said he prefer this park for displaying this characteristic. He was doing an illegal activity but at the same time he was looking for a place to relax as other users.

A number of teenagers addressed the issue of security; they thought that security needed to improve. However, observations noted that the park has high security devices and that at the same time is very tranquil. An interpretation of these perceptions is that in Niza Park, teenagers may have some misconceptions about the security of the place or at least, their perceptions are exaggerated. This type of thinking perhaps has been learned from adults. This sense of insecurity among teenagers, adults and elders may be the main reason to Niza users to keep their life and their recreation semi-private. Perhaps this is the reason why this park has some features that imply some privatisation of this public space. It is a possibility that this lifestyle is a cause of Niza Park users being suspicious about users from other places.
6.5.3 Adults

The neighbourhood representative interviewed started the association by her own initiative over ten years ago. She mentioned that since then, she has been seeking help from the neighbours but most of them are not responsive. She commented that wealthy people do not respond to community engagement:

*The more money they have the less they respond to us...they expect to be given everything because they pay taxes. With high socioeconomic levels one cannot work with low socioeconomic levels is much better.*

She mentioned that she completed a certificate in community participation and by comparing her experience in community work with others experiences she concluded that rich people are not willing to participate in this type of actions. This point is very important in Niza community because despite the efforts of the neighbours association many residents do not contribute and complain about urban issues. The belief the city administration should provide everything because of the taxes they pay, and the frustration of not seeing adequate provision, encourages negative approaches towards the city administration. Neighbourhood associations play an important role in mediating between the community and the city government and for that reason they are an important part of the urban administrative structure. In Niza, the neighbourhood association has been to some extent undervalued despite their constant work in the neighbourhood and specifically the park.

In 2000 the neighbourhood association and Bogotá´s botanic gardens developed a project to restore the vegetation of the park as part of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. This program presented both positive and negative responses. The neighbourhood representative said:

*It was a real challenge, they [botanic gardens] displayed informative banners to explain what they were doing and why...many residents thought that cutting the trees was outrageous and they impeded to finish the work...*
The Niza project for restoring vegetation has been very important for the community; it has reflected not only the positive but also the negative aspects concerning negotiation and conflict.

Other similar events occurred in other parts of the city and one of them had tragic conclusion with the death of two people after an accident occurred during the conflict. These issues demonstrate the weakness of communication and negotiation related to the execution of urban initiatives. This weakness may be stressed by citizens’ distrust in their government and the lack of strong neighbours associations that serve as communication channels for this type of initiatives. Additionally there have been various public initiatives that have often been unfinished, this abandonment and unreliability of the city administration makes difficult that people believe in them.

In terms of public space regulations, the neighbourhood representative said:

I do care about public space and its qualities, but it is very difficult to maintain and keep safe… the guards are very important to us… his duties include stopping activities that may occur such as people smoking marihuana or street vendors… we also have security alarms in the surrounding houses and the alarm can also be activated by the guard, it connects with the police station so in case of robbery the police should get here in minutes… for us security is the most important factor of wellbeing in our neighbourhood.

There are various issues to analyse in terms of security in this park. The fact that the neighbourhood has full time security guards hired by the neighbourhood shows the importance of the feeling of security in this park and neighbourhood. There are also two buildings of apartments in the same block and they also have security guards and security cameras for the park (see Figure 6.25).
The main physical element that represents protection to this people is the fence they built themselves. This fence is not legal but none has made any effort to take it out, on the contrary they have made all efforts to keep it there. The security guard said:

_The neighbours built a fence on the limit with that road. Some people trespass the fence but it protects a lot. If the fence were taken away, that would be terrible for the security of the park._

He also mentioned the existence of the alarms mentioned above. Security is one of the prime issues in this neighbourhood, maybe because they are wealthy they may be afraid to be robbed or blackmailed and they seem to have special wary against outsiders. In street interviews several adults commented that the problems of the park in regards to security are because of outsiders and they like to see local people in the park not unknown because they never know when they are good and when they are thieves. The guard said:

_People really like this park because thanks to the security they don’t see homeless people, street children or mad persons. I don’t want to discriminate but those people_
are from other world. People like the park for the recreation, good maintenance and security.

This feeling of insecurity is wide spread among citizens of Bogotá. The city has had a history of crime, and violence. However, the city has improved significantly since the late nineties. Latest statistics show that the city still struggles with crime and violence especially in disadvantageous areas of the city. Niza Park is not in a disadvantageous area of the city, there have been robberies and some other minor incidents but people seem to be more stressed and concerned about crime than other communities in higher risk areas such as Villa neighbourhood.

6.5.4 Elders

Most elders mentioned their concerns for the maintenance, cleaning and good condition of the park. Other age groups worried more about security but it seems that elders consider the park secure enough since they made little comments about it. The majority of elders expressed the concern that other people may not take care of the park, as they should whereas neighbourhood residents do. Some seniors noted:

Instead of destroying it [the park] everyone should contribute to make the park more comfortable.

Overall the park should be kept clean by everyone.

They insisted that there are rules that should be followed in order to keep the park in good condition and with good ambience. Several elders recommended that people take more care of the park but they did not complain about other users habits in the park as several adults did.

Elders rated issues such as security, cleanliness, maintenance, conviviality, recreation and environment highly. Several elders think that cleanliness and maintenance could be better but it is acceptable in general. They also said that security is fine because of the presence of the 24 hours security guard. Several seniors think that conviviality is fine but could improve and they considered that recreation is positive as well, especially for children. One senior said:
Security? I don’t know but it seems good because there are bodyguards … cleanliness? Today is fine but generally it is average…maintenance is ok because the lawn is cut periodically… environment is beautiful, excellent… conviviality is good and recreation is enough because there are sports and playgrounds but the courts are a bit damaged.

For the majority of elders the element that they consider most important is the environment of the park. Vegetation, arborization and gardening in the park is very significant to the point that it is the main reason for them visiting the park. Observations showed that in the front area of the park there is a little garden that some adults and elders take care of (see Figure 6.26). They grow flowers and many people comment about the mini garden from the park. This mini garden shows potential for an activity that could contribute to improve the physical environment of the park as well as community ties and spatial practice.

Figure 6.26. Garden planted by some neighbours

6.6 Identity and sense of belonging: Our park is our pride, our contentment.

Park users generally expressed feelings and perceptions about the park that related to a sense of ownership, a sense of belonging or identification to the park. These
perceptions sometimes were enriched or generated from the memories, personal stories, and experiences of park users in natural environments (other parks or countryside settings). These perceptions and feelings influence the way park users envision, use and project the park for the future. Thus, a sense of belonging or identification to the park is important component of spatial practice in the present. It is also a significant element to continue consolidating the park in its social, physical, historical, urban and administrative spheres in a holistic way.

6.6.1 Children

A drawing from 2002 shows a heart, the others do not have references to feelings from the children who made them. The heart perhaps represents that this child cares for the park, or that it is a place that makes this child content. In general, children drew the park as an enjoyable environment that implies positive feelings. An important element of attachment in these drawings are the trees especially the cherry tree which means a lot to children and other users of the park. The cherry tree is important for parks users, it is a mature tree that has been in the park for long time, it produces lots of cherries that children and adults enjoy picking up and people talk about the tree as an important element of the park. Most of the drawings have a strong representation of the environmental elements specially it is noticeable that two of them picture birds in nests, or flying. Children appear to have a high appreciation of the environmental quality of this park.

Drawings from 2004 picture the park as an enjoyable place to be. Two drawings pictured a water feature despite the fact that there are no water features in this park (see Figure 6.27). It may imply that the children who made the drawings would like to have an element like this in the park. It is a sign of identification with the park or sense of belonging that children added elements that they would like to have. This sort of design exercise shows that these children may have been thinking about the park and care enough to add other elements that would be good to have in the park. Since various children were visitors in the park they may just have drawn their observations about the park without much thought, the important element that was present most times was the playground.
There is one drawing that on one side of the paper the child tried to picture the playground but it seems this child gave up, turned the page and drew a scene with a car, a tree, a house and some other elements that are difficult to identify. Perhaps in some cases children would like to picture more ideas and experiences about the park but their drawings skills did not allow them to do that. It is important to acknowledge that this situation may have occurred to some children participants, however, most drawings represent the main characteristics that children highlight from Niza Park.

One of the first motivations to build the park was children’s use; as the neighbourhood representative said:

*When we recently moved in the neighbourhood we had some activities such as Children’s day, celebrated in the park... we also had environmental campaigns*
addressed to children in order to increase their environmental awareness and teach them to love and take care of the park.

The then children, today young adults still living there (for instance her own children) remember these activities as part of their happy memories in this park and for that reason they have some attachment to it. This was an initiative from the neighbours and the city administration did not participate. These memories show that when children are involved in such activities it contributes to the development of children to become content adults. These memories also belong to the history of neighbourhood. They show that there is identity and sense of belonging in this park, at least from the older neighbours. Recent activities documented in the data do not include such involvement of children and may be an issue that was stronger in the past but weaken in recent years.

This park is also a remembrance from earlier times when the neighbourhood had suburban characteristics and it did not have the traffic and congestion that has now. The attempts of neighbours to maintain the park true to their original perception makes them very proud of the park. This pride may be transmitted to children since they represented these natural features in their drawings. The drawings also show that children perceive the park as being more suburban and natural park than other more common neighbourhood parks in the city. For these children Niza Park doesn’t have many urban characteristics despite the fact that children have always been immerse in a complete urban environment.

6.6.2 Teenagers

Teenagers also indicated feelings of identity and a sense of belonging in the park and the neighbourhood. A teenager said:

My first memory of the park was when I was about five years old... I came here and join a group of children that were from a school, perhaps from outside the neighbourhood... I have met many people in the park, we known each other since we
were kids...we grew up here and our group has grown as well, we are about 24 people now... we are very close, we come here to play and enjoy the nature and sometimes in the year we organise camping trips out of the city... it’s good to be able to make friends in here, I would like that this happen more and we get closer and make more friends.

This group seems very strong despite the fact that they are an informal group in the sense that they are not engaged in formal activities that required their commitment. This is confirmation on how people can use the public space of the park to strengthen their identity as neighbours and friends. This comment also shows that the park is a vital place for building relationships and because of that people acquire a sense of belonging with the park.

As mentioned earlier, the most particular characteristic of this park is its strong orientation for passive recreation. Some sports are practiced on weekends, mainly by young adults and adults, but sports are not the main activity of the park. This fact decreases the potential for identity and sense of belonging by teenagers. They are active people in the community and the fact that they are not encouraged to practice sports in the park is a limitation for them to build identity and a sense of belonging with the park through establishing relationships with people in the park. They may have a strong orientation for sports in school and sports clubs, but this activity has been slowly taken away from Niza Park.

On the other hand, passive recreation provides a number of ways to encourage identity and sense of belonging. Teenagers remember elements related to the nature of the park, for instance, a couple of youth said:

This tree was planted when I was born and now is much taller than me.

I come to the park sometimes when I am happy and sometimes when I am sad... the park makes me feel better ... I come here to relax and think more clearly.

It appears that Niza Park is more used by adults and elders, for that reason some teenagers seem to feel alienated. Adults are suspicious about teenagers wondering
around in the park, however, what teenagers need are more activities to do and more possibilities to get involved with the community. The opportunities for leisure activities is under explored, there are many passive recreation activities that could be attractive to teenagers and could increase identity and sense of belonging, cultural activities such as serenades, bonfires, theatre or picnics for instance.

6.6.3 Adults

Community work is very important for the neighbourhood association; some members have undertaken courses provided by the city administration, for example a workshop on public space and a course on conviviality and community agency. The representative stated:

_The parks are our pride...I really like communitarian work related to the park because it increases the value of our properties, it (the park) contributes a lot to good quality of life and recently, people's response has been improving._

Despite the difficulties, the neighbourhood association has been working in the park since its creation. It indicates a strong sense of community in which the park has played the role of getting the community together with a common cause. The park seems to be the focuses of community work in the neighbourhood. For that reason it is the most important element for community building in this neighbourhood. At the same time it appears that the lack of interest of many neighbours have been changing slowly. It may be due to the improvements in the park, especially because the park offers the opportunity to reunite people in a physical setting, in an informal way and the park can also show physically most of the community work conducted through the years.

In the case of Niza Park, it is clear how the physical characteristics of the park have influenced the sense of belonging and identity of the park users. The natural environment with plenty of trees, birds, flowers and other natural elements in the middle of the city is significant for residents and visitors of Niza. For adults in Niza a symbolic element of their environment that is highly representative is the cherry tree. This cherry tree in a way is an icon that shows the consolidation of the park through
the years it also confirms the character of the park as a space for contemplation of the nature, relaxation and peace.

In regards to the quiet character of the park, some adults expressed:

*Many times I come here and do some walking and I feel different, more motivated...one feels love for the place that makes one feel good.*

*Sometimes when I am upset I come here to chill out...it means relaxation and distraction to me...I feel like it is mine because I come here and enjoy it whenever I want.*

*I wouldn’t like any activities in the park because I want to come here for its tranquillity, my feelings when I come here depend on how my day was but it is pretty and brings tranquillity.*

Many adults relate the nature of the park and its tranquillity to a sense of relief, a sense of relaxation that leads to a sense of happiness. The combination of natural environment with tranquillity and low use seems to impact positively on adults’ motivation to visit the park and in general to their emotional state. Some interviewees noted:

*Everybody should have sense of belonging for this park and respect it because it is public and we all pay taxes for it.*

*I come here in all moods, today for example I am a little bit down and came here to chill out...it is like a therapy.*

Adults in Niza see the park as an important place to express, perhaps control and many times to change their feelings. It seems the natural characteristics of the park contributes to change emotional states from distressing or bad moods to relaxed and content moods. The fact that the park can alter emotional states shows that people have identification to the park and sense of belonging because it is a place out of their houses where they can relax and feel better, not only physically but also emotionally.
Niza residents are very proud of the park they have and how it brings a convivial natural atmosphere to their neighbourhood (see Figure 6.28).

![Image](image_url)

Figure 6.28. Image on how the park blends with the urban structure of the neighbourhood.

### 6.6.4 Elders

Sense of identity and sense of belonging are significant issues for elders using the Niza Park. It appears that they identify the park as the space where community relationships can be exercised to the point of improving identity and sense of belonging. Several elders commented that they like this park much more than other parks in the nearby area. Some senior interviewees said:

*Compared with others, the vegetation of this park is very important, not like the park in my hometown, which have been destroyed.*

*This park is very pretty; in this area it is the best.*

*There may be better parks but this one is the one I like because it is close to my house.*

These comments demonstrate that elders identify with and have sense of belonging for this park. However, it appears that these feelings and perceptions are at the personal rather than group or collective level. Several elders expressed the view that they would like other people to feel that way or have more communitarian activities to strengthen and share these feelings. Spatial practice in Niza indicates a potential for improving identity and sense of community.
One of the challenges, as the neighbourhood representative mentioned earlier, is the unwillingness of people to help in the creation of such activities. They want only to be participants, perhaps as citizens they demand services to be provided. However, there are not consolidated or institutionalised mechanisms in place to provide services to improve community life. This means that if a community wants to strengthen ties, people have to create the mechanisms themselves and they have to commit and engage in them by participating but more importantly by creating and conducting these activities or mechanisms.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the ways spatial practice occurs and changes in Niza Park. Children are important users of this park and the majority of activities in the park involve children and the playgrounds. Youth, on the other hand seem to need more opportunities for participation in initiatives and for using the park in the active ways that they seem they want to use the park. Differences in the way youth and adults recreate in the park seems to be causing some conflict between these groups when they use the park.

Niza Park has a high orientation toward passive recreation and relaxation that is encouraged by adults and elders. The consolidation of the vegetation contributes to recreate a space for relaxation and quiet leisure. The character of the park appears to be a result of an interweaving of influences such as people’s memories of natural spaces, their perception of public space, their recreational needs and other social, economic and urban influences. It is fascinating how all these influences produced a park with particular character or a kind of space with personality.

Park users from Niza regard very highly the consolidated vegetation of their park, traditional residents feel proud of having participated in the landscaping and maintenance of the vegetation through the years. Furthermore newer residents and visitors mentioned that they moved to live in the area or commute to get there because the natural environment is exceptional.
Several of the characteristics of Niza Park relate to the socio-economic status of the residents of the neighbourhood. It seems that wealthy people see public space in a different perspective from people from lower socio-economic status; this may be because they have more private spaces and opportunities to entertain. Their approach to public space is somehow distant in the sense that they value having a park in front of their houses but for them it is more a landscape or a view than the place to use actively.

Metropolitan levels of urban planning, at least in this city, need to acknowledge and start understanding the way spatial practice generates public space and specific urban public lifestyles, in order to be able to generate initiatives that improve the quality of urban life in residents. Chapter 7 addresses the characteristics of Villa and Niza Parks comparatively by contrasting similarities and differences. It also analyses issues of spatial practice interwoven with governmental factors that affect spatial practice and urban public life in Bogotá.
Chapter 7: Equality within the differences
7.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 discussed and analysed in detail how Villa and Niza Parks are used, perceived, and constructed continuously by their users. This set of relationships between stakeholders in local parks, perceptions, uses and approaches to recreation are compiled in this research as spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá. This chapter explores the two remaining questions for this research, which refer to how spatial practice occurs across different socio-economic status and the examination of the impacts of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ at the local level.

- How does socio-economic status impact upon spatial practice and urban public life in these two neighbourhood parks?

- Has the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ adequately responded to spatial practice and urban public life in local parks by addressing and fulfilling park users needs?

It was identified in Chapters 2 and 3 that socio-economic segregation in Bogotá is a strong issue affecting spatial practice. This chapter interweaves similarities and differences of the spatial practice in Villa and Niza parks and addresses how the issue of social segregation impacts upon residents’ lifestyles and quality of life. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the relationships between the municipal government and local residents of Bogotá, in terms of provision and use of local parks. This examination takes into account the relationship of a top-down approach from the government with a bottom-up understanding from the local communities examined.
The first part of this chapter compares Villa and Niza Parks, this comparison is organised around two main themes. The first theme compares the characteristics that make each park unique. It includes the comparison of the perception that people attach to their park, how they relate to the park, recreation, and facilities. The second theme compares the relationships of park users with their parks and with other people using the parks.

The second part of this chapter addresses the local understanding from communities of the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. This government initiative represents the top-down perspective to parks and the understandings from communities represent the bottom-up approaches to this initiative. This section shows the findings in relation to how ‘Parks for learning how to live’ addressed issues of ‘democratisation’ of public space, communication between government and local communities and issues of participation of local communities. Furthermore, findings regarding sustainability of parks, citizens, perspectives and local communities perspectives are discussed.

### 7.2 Comparison of parks

Chapter 3 describes the main characteristics of public space in Bogotá. Villa and Niza are two neighbourhood parks that belong to the city’s network of over 4,000 parks. They are relatively close to each other but they belong to different income levels of the city. Villa is a Strata 2 neighbourhood. Niza is a Strata 5 neighbourhood. Chapter 3 explained the stratification system of Bogotá. Villa has low-income residents, and properties are low price. Villa neighbourhood has relatively low urban quality; this means it has a higher density than the average of the city, poor infrastructure, modest housing, and a lack of facilities. Niza, on the other hand, has high-income residents and therefore it has generally lower density than the average of the city, housing is expensive, infrastructure is established, and it generally has adequate facilities.
7.2.1 Character of the parks

This research has found that local parks are public spaces that embody and depict a special and unique combination of interactions. The richness of their spatial practice depends on the characteristics of the community that uses the parks, in conjunction with the physical characteristics of the parks. It was also found that neighbourhood parks are different from other type of parks because they are generally more accessible because of their proximity to residential areas, and people relate to them on everyday basis. Local parks are often adaptable to a wide variety of uses and they combine a number of recreational. Villa and Niza Parks reflect a unique spatial practice of these two communities. The spatial practice from these two local parks shows some commonalities and at the same time a number of contrasting elements that relate to recreation and the use of public space.

7.2.1.1 Villa Park

This research identified that the character of Villa Park is in some respects similar to a Latin American colonial town plaza, specifically from rural towns. Chapter 3 describes the main characteristics of the Spanish colonial urbanisation in Latin America. A country town plaza is generally a dynamic place where a variety of activities (recreational, civic, economic, social) are developed simultaneously. These plazas are the most important places for social gathering in rural towns. Plazas represent the hierarchical architectural element of colonial towns (Zambrano, 1990). In colonial towns, the buildings around the plaza are of special significance; for instance the church, the city council, and town hall are located there. The most important commercial places are also located around the plaza (Arango, 1989). This architectural and urban hierarchy added to the importance of the plaza for social interactions and make country town plazas display dynamic, and highly social, spatial practice.

Villa Park has developed in a somewhat similar fashion to a country town plaza for various reasons. The first reason identified is that this park has an established commercial area around it, which provides residents with shops for everyday needs. For that reason it resembles the commercial activity of a country town plaza, and converts the park and the surroundings into a focal centre of social interactions in the
neighbourhood. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Villa neighbourhood has approximately 2,532 residents (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital, 2003). Villa Park is the largest and most representative park in the neighbourhood and serves to all residents of Villa.

This research has also identified that Villa Park resembles a country town plaza because many park users share the memories of their experiences from rural towns, where they used to live before, and translate those memories to their park. A large number of residents of this neighbourhood are first and second generation migrants from rural areas, and in interviews many of them mentioned that they used to enjoy the social interactions in the main plazas of their home towns and that they would like this park to replicate those experiences. Lefebvre (1991) identified a conceptual triad as a model for understanding the phenomenon of space production. This conceptual triad, as explained in Chapter 2, incorporates ‘representational space’ such as memories and perceptions about the space, ‘spatial practice’ as the empirical, sensorial, approximation to space, and the ‘representations of space’ as the conceptual or more theoretical framework to space. This research has identified that in Villa Park, users have been able to transfer their memories from rural town plazas to their current spatial practice in Villa Park, and these memories are referred as ‘representational space’ in Lefebvre’s book. This transfer has occurred since the beginning of the neighbourhood even when the park was merely vacant land.

This research has also revealed that because of the illegal origin of Villa neighbourhood, the park remained as vacant land for many years. However, in the residents’ minds this area was always considered a park and was used as a park long before it was actually built as such. It demonstrates how spatial practice in this park was influenced by social activities and people’s perception about the park. Thus, the fact that Villa Park was only physically established recently and the fact that people had strong memories from their urban experience in country town plazas contributed to the production of a space that replicates peoples expectations.

People who mentioned the relationship between the park and their memory of a plaza appear to perceive country town plazas as icons of close social ties and attachment to place and the environment. This research found that the spatial practice of Villa Park
is continuously approximating such dynamic and close-knit spatial practice because that is the spatial code that many Villa users want to create. Perhaps the fact that Villa Park users could not enjoy a consolidated, planned and appropriately constructed park for many years reaffirmed their memories and expectations about this park and for that reason their perceptions strongly drive the way they develop their spatial practice in Villa Park.

This research also found that the location of this park right next to the airport generated a particular use in this park. People from the surrounding areas used to visit it for the sole purpose of watching airplanes taking off and landing. This particular activity was significant for these people because they were generally people from low-income areas of the city for whom travelling by plane is not affordable. Thus, spatial practice in Villa Park has always been influenced by ‘representational space’ in the form of memories of the country, dreams or expectations for better times, by the improvement of the park or imagining their first trip by plane.

7.2.1.2 Niza Park

This research identified that the character of Niza Park differs greatly from the character of Villa Park regardless of sharing some physical similarities. As Chapter 3 shows, residents from Niza belong to a wealthy socio-economic status. This research found that to its users, Niza Park is a space that depicts tranquillity. This space relates more to a landscape or a retreat. A large number of users agreed that this park is a contemplative space and that they were not looking for dynamic activities such as sports. Relaxation, quietness and the natural environment are the park’s main characteristics.

In Niza Park, as the data of this research showed, an issue that has significantly impacted upon the characterisation of the park is their socio-economic status. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, socio-economic status is a strong characteristic of the city, physically as well as socially. People from Niza experience a socio-economic status that allows them to live relatively comfortably. Furthermore this socio-economic status is important in the way people from Niza perceive their urban experience. Generally, residents from high socio economic status have to maintain high standards in their everyday life. In the local park, these standards are often
present. Interviews with park users in Niza show that the spatial practice of Niza Park is shaped by the display of those standards and users who do not reflect those standards, either in their habits or dress code, are seen as suspicious, sometimes undesirable.

This social segregation occurs in all parts of the society (Skinner, 2004), but because Niza residents belong to a high socio-economic status their responses to lower socio-economic status are more evident. This research found that in Niza Park residents perhaps demonstrate that they maintain their position in society by a rather quiet and inconspicuous use of the park, limiting behaviours that could be perceived as exaggerated. Niza Park users tend to participate in activities that they consider sophisticated or up to their level. For instance some park users commented that it is inappropriate to roll on the grass; or that they enjoyed participation in dogs shows because it was closer to their interests.

Another characterisation of the park that arises from the resident’s socio-economic status is their need for, and ability to pay for security. This research found that security is a priority in this park. As mentioned earlier this park has 24-hour private surveillance that include a number of alarms located in strategic points, security cameras and the presence of security guards in charge of the park and the houses surrounding the park. They have also built a fence that is illegal but the majority of residents consider this fence a vital part of their security. In Bogotá, and in general in large cities, security is a vital concern for all socio-economic levels (Skinner, 2004). However, it is interesting to observe that while statistics show that disadvantaged areas are more insecure than advantaged areas in the city (Office of the Mayor Bogotá, 2000), in wealthy neighbourhoods, security is higher. In the case of Niza their security is high mainly because it is funded privately, whereas in Villa the security comes from the metropolitan police because residents cannot afford private security.

This research identified that the background of Niza Park users appears to be more urban than the background of Villa Park users. Niza residents moved from other neighbourhoods within the city, rather than from the country to the city. Many of them grew up in Bogotá and recall an image of commemorative, historic parks from areas closer to the downtown. In the years before the 1960s, the well-known parks
were commemorative parks that were designed and built trying to emulate European gardens (Arango, 1989; Montezuma, 2001). Subsequently, rapid urbanisation, densification and the use of technology for constructing roads and bridges limited the increment of large urban commemorative parks. This research found that the strong memory of the monumentality and civic significance of these parks might have shaped the idea that parks were landscapes to admire and enjoy by engaging in quiet activities. Furthermore, the original residents of the neighbourhood moved to this neighbourhood looking for a less crowded suburban area and in the search of ‘natural’ space. They have tried to maintain this atmosphere despite the strong impacts of the urbanisation of the city.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Latin American cities have always been influenced by images of landscapes from the developed world. The desire to have ‘Europeanised’ urban space appears to be more evident in high socio-economic areas (Arango, 1989; Jaramillo, 2003). The data from this research shows that there might be a connection between Niza Park users perceiving their park as a landscape, contemplative space perhaps similar to European gardens, and for that reason they characterise their park as a retreat, garden-like space that is part of the view from their houses. This symbolic image, or representational space in Lefebvre’s words, has shaped Niza’s spatial practice as a relaxed environment, with passive recreation, quietness and natural attractiveness.

7.2.2 Park users: interactions in the parks

This research has found that in both parks users perceive recreation as a significant part of their lives, therefore the existence of parks nearby their homes is very important. Park users in both parks understand that their parks are an indicator of the quality of life in their neighbourhoods, especially in dense cities such as Bogotá. The research for this thesis identified that age groups of users in both parks (children, youth, adults and elders) have different approaches to the ways they use their parks. Furthermore, rules and behaviours in the park show how people relate to each other and to the space of the park in specific ways; these themes are discussed as follows.
7.2.2.1 Age groups

It emerged from the data that recreation is important to all park users. However, different age groups have different approaches to recreation. Both parks are used by people of all ages. Children’s recreation is mainly founded on games and the use of the playground. Children are important users in both parks. In interviews from both parks, people of all ages mentioned that parks are the special urban space for children and that many of them go to the park only to take their children to the park. Others highlighted that children make their parks more enjoyable. The spatial practice in the two parks shows that children are self-confident when they are in the park. They also display different power relationships that are reflected in the way they interact with parents or carers. Thus, this research found that the local park is the ‘natural’ recreational space that is the domain of children, and children are one of the main drives of the spatial practice in local parks.

This research has found that for teenagers, the main purpose of their recreational activities in the parks is socialisation. In Niza, youth engage mostly in passive recreation. On the other hand, in Villa teenagers are highly involved in a variety of sport activities. Some sport activities have been formally organised and have involved the participation of large part of the community such as the soccer tournaments in Villa Park. Other sport activities are more informally or even privately organised, for example in Niza Park a martial arts instructor organised weekend classes. This research also found that youth from Niza are discontent as they are not able to practice many sport activities because adults and elders dislike the impact of sports activities in the park and the sports fields are in poor condition.

Adults from both parks consider that the park is mainly for relaxation and for the use of others but them. Adults constantly mentioned that they go to the park to take their children, or walk the dog, or accompany elders. The majority of adults in both parks believe that parks exist for the recreation of others but adults use their park as much as other age groups. Interestingly, in Villa some people use the park for work; some are vendors who sell their goods or services in the park. Observations also showed that some trades person used the park as a workplace. However, in Villa Park adults are more willing to participate in sport activities and engage in more diverse uses. Some
interviewees mentioned that they would like to have art performances and aerobics. In Niza, on the other hand, adults prefer a quiet, tranquil walk or sitting and chatting with relatives or friends.

In both parks, elderly people seek relaxation and tranquillity, as well as a good natural environment in the park. However, in Villa Park elders would like to have more interaction with other people than in Niza Park. Elders from Villa seem to be more socially oriented, in accordance to the ‘plaza’ characterisation of the park. In Niza elders regard the natural environment and tranquillity as the most important values of the park, and they prefer to be alone or in smaller groups, this also follows the characterisation of Niza Park as a landscape or quiet retreat.

Different age groups have identified their own particular niche in both parks, and this special niche relates to their recreational, cultural and social needs. Regardless of socio-economic status, specific age groups in both parks share some common perceptions. Children from both parks consider the park their domain. Youth’s main interest to use their park is to socialise and meet other young people. Adults in both parks think that the park is mainly for the use of other age groups. And elders in both parks are looking for a place to relax.

The research for this thesis analysed the issues of uses of parks by separating the experiences of different age groups. The extent and depth of the issues analysed in Chapters 5 and 6 made it difficult to make further subdivisions according to age categories. The researcher acknowledges that the adult category includes life stages that differed from each other. Some considerations to this emerged in the data; however, it was more important to analyse the issues concerning spatial practice in the parks than focusing on very detailed age differentiations.

During data collection there was information gathered on gender. However, the focus of the thesis was spatial practice in parks and gender issues were not part of the research design. This research acknowledges the importance of such data, especially in a highly genderised society like Colombia and where appropriate in the data chapters gender differentiation are noted. However, because the analysis of spatial practice is an innovative area of study in the region, it was deemed more important to
analyse spatial practice across genders. Gender differentiation in spatial practice is recommended for further research, in which this study may contribute as a framework or starting point of reference.

The character and the socio-economic status of each park makes that sometimes these age groups find the right space to develop their practices with little restrictions or that sometimes they find restrictions to do what they would like to do. For instance, spatial practice in Niza Park seems to be more limited that in Villa Park in terms of the variety of activities people can engage in. Some rules are general to the city such as maintain parks clean and the need to maintain security levels. However, this research has found that these communities decide by themselves what is better for their community in terms of regulations in the parks. They establish the regulations and rules that fit their needs and that are adequate to the characterisation of the park.

7.2.2.2 Rules and behaviours in parks

In general, park users in these two neighbourhoods acknowledge that parks can serve as educational spaces where people learn about conviviality, tolerance and sharing. A number of studies have noted that parks are places for improving positive social behaviours (Jaramillo, 2003; Mockus, 2002; Observatorio de cultura urbana & Comision de cultura ciudadana, 2002). It was identified from interviews that park users regard highly the good behaviour of other park users at the same time that they are vigilant to disruptive or antisocial behaviours. The empirical data from this research corroborates claims in Mockus’s study on urban pedagogy and accomplishment of the rules. The main claim is that people believe that they obey the rules very well and at the same time believe that others do not obey the rules as they do (Mockus, 2002). Interviews from this research reflect that these preconceptions of good personal behaviour against negative behaviour of other users are common in the perceptions of people from Villa and Niza Parks. However, when people were asked if they have seen episodes of disruptive behaviour in their park, they answered that they have never or hardly ever seen any disruption in their park. They sometimes mentioned that they have heard rumours that negative episodes have taken place but that they have not seen any of those episodes. Mockus states that parks are spaces to contest and change preconceptions that may limit the potential of parks for
conviviality and tolerance. The educational potential of parks needs to be encouraged and strengthened.

Parks are scenarios for social encounters; these encounters play an important role in the way people behave in public. This research has found that there is a clear self-awareness that park users are being observed and at the same time they have the opportunity to observe others. This perception seems to guide many of the behaviours of park users and mainly because of that reason behaviours in the park may be more convivial than behaviours in private spaces. For example, the police officer from Villa mentioned that he or his squad have never encountered disruptive behaviours in the park apart from some drunken people late at night. On the other hand he also mentioned that there are a large number of domestic disputes in the houses in this neighbourhood and that they have to intervene in these. This research has found that the power of public space in regulating people’s behaviours is significant, and this power perhaps could contribute to conviviality and community building.

Despite the fact that the relationships in both parks seem to be harmonious, it was identified that there are some tensions between some age groups. In both parks there is tension in which teenagers are not well accepted by adults and elders. This tension has been experienced by these three age groups. However, this tension is low in Villa Park and high in Niza Park. On one side teenagers feel that they are not accepted in the park and that what they do annoy adults and elders. On the other hand some adults and elders commented that teenagers might display negative behaviours that should not be accepted in the park.

The history of Villa Park shows that the tension between teenagers and adults and elders has occurred for a long time. Some youth from this neighbourhood tend to join gangs and display disruptive behaviours in public space. Before the park was consolidated, the actions of gangs affected the neighbourhood negatively. However, after the construction of the park with new and adequate facilities for the use of the community Villa Park users negotiated with youth and they stopped vandalising the park. Nowadays, the community is able to share the park without many negative impacts. Young people use the park mostly in the evenings; because the park has
appropriate illumination at night, and there is no documented conflict between youth and other age groups in regards to the use of the park since then.

From the previous example, this research found that the provision of recreational space to young people seems to contribute to decrease illegal activities in the park. Since young people feel more accepted, they have decided to use the park more appropriately, they have stopped vandalism and the park has been maintained in relatively good condition. Perhaps this is an indicator of how positive behaviours can be learnt in the public space from accepting differences, sharing the space and diminishing the alienation of some groups. Negotiation in the public space seems to be an important part of spatial practice in local parks because they are spaces very much needed by all age groups.

It was identified that in Niza Park the tension between youth and other age groups seems to be affecting the way different age groups relate to each other. One reason for this tension in Niza seems to be the misconceptions each age group has about other groups. For instance, for adults and elders, youth are irresponsible and they tend to be involved in inappropriate behaviours in the park. They may think that public space facilitates the occurrence of negative activities because public space is not ‘controlled’ by anyone. On the other hand, youth feel restrained from using public space freely because adults and elders are always suspicious about them. This research revealed that the fact that adults and elders do not often trust young people in the park makes them feel alienated and resentful. There has not been any attempt to negotiate each group’s needs in Niza Park, perhaps because there has not been any major situation that has affected the park. However, it represents a negative impact to the community to allow this latent tension and resentment to grow. Another issue that increases the tension between different age groups is that the relaxed and quiet character of the park inhibits the active participation of teenagers in sport or cultural activities that implies higher levels of noise and movement, such as sports tournaments and musical or theatrical performances. To end this conflict it may be necessary to create ways in which different age groups could communicate their needs and expectations, decrease misconceptions about each other, and share public space in a more inclusive manner.
This section has identified the similarities and differences in the spatial practice of Villa and Niza Parks. The main issues arising are their different characterisations in which socio-economic status plays an important role. This characterisation is reflected in the spatial practice in each park, and at the same time spatial practice continues to provide character to each park. The character of each park, constructed by interweaving the three elements composing Lefebvre’s spatial triad (spatial practice, representational space and representations of space), will continue evolving, shaping and representing each community. For that reason, the bottom-up understanding of local parks reflected in the analysis of their spatial practice is significant for understanding public space and the society using public space.

Similarities in spatial practice of the park relate to the nature of recreation and what the recreational activity means to different groups within the community. Spatial practice integrates the perception of public space with the ideals of what the space should be used for. The dynamics of recreation in these two parks show that the commonly shared concept of recreation in Bogotá, passive recreation and sports, (Cadavid, 1993; Carr et al., 1992; Urbana en Línea Consejo Editorial, 2001) does not always cover the diversity and dynamism of the recreational and leisure needs of residents of Bogotá.

The potential for development of parks largely depends on exploring different ways of perceiving and engaging in recreation in the park. These ways involve sports, civic activities, relaxation, cultural activities, community sharing, community consultation, tolerance, negotiation of conflicts, community development, individual development, contemplation, social relationships between families, age groups, neighbours, community, society and perception of the experience of the urban life in the city. The use of public space in Bogotá seems to reaffirm the identity as citizens, as ‘Bogotanos’, as part of the community, as individuals and as social personas with the need and obligation to respect differences.
7.3 Local understanding of metropolitan, government initiatives

This section addresses how the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ has been perceived by park users at the local level. This project, as mentioned in Chapter 3, has been positively recognised as a change agent in the urban and social structure of Bogotá. It has even been internationally recognised as a remarkable improvement initiative for the city. However, there have not been documented qualitative evaluation to spatial practice in local parks that show the impacts of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ on local parks and local communities. This evaluation permits us to understand how contributing the project has been to the most important stakeholders: park users.

Contemporary qualitative approaches in research have increasingly focused on the bottom-up understanding or local level of urban phenomena (Altman & Low, 1992; Buraglia, 1998; Setha M Low, 1996; Urban Parks Institute, 1998). The reason for this is the acknowledgement that local communities hold a tacit knowledge that is instrumental to urban planning and development. As mentioned in Chapter 3, in Bogotá, the top-down approach to urban planning and management has been the approach that leads to urban initiatives, often excluding community involvement. Several studies have noted that in Latin American cities, government initiatives have often been poorly implemented and poorly communicated (Jaramillo, 2003; Montezuma, 2001; Viviescas, 2001). The data from this research shows that sometimes the initiatives do not respond to the actual needs of residents because they are formulated on the basis of external influences instead of being formulated on the basis of community consultation. ‘Parks for learning how to live’ demonstrated being successful in the metropolitan level, but this research shows that the project weakened at the local level.

7.3.1 Governance during the park’s project

As Chapter 3 presents, the success of the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ has been the largest and most publicised success in the modern history of governance in Bogotá. However, part of its success was because ‘Citizens’ culture’ (the main
initiative from the Mockus-Bromberg administration 1995-1997) opened a niche for improving social relationships that was further developed in ‘Parks for learning how to live’. The first initiative tackled issues of tolerance and conviviality in the city; the second initiative addressed socio-spatial issues in public space attempting to follow a complementary approach. ‘Parks for learning how to live’ also challenged negative preconceptions that residents used to have about Bogotá. Residents of Bogotá not only improved their views of the city and their own behaviours but also started enjoying new spaces where they could experience these social and spatial changes. The description of both initiatives is recounted in Chapter 3, they were two top-down initiatives because they were formulated and executed by the municipal governments between 1995 and 2000.

7.3.1.1 ‘Democratisation’ of the public space

One of the purposes of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ was to publicise and communicate the project in a way that would be appealing to residents in order to generate attachment to the city. Mayor Enrique Peñaloza and his team were creative in constructing a new image of the city to Bogotá’s citizens, and in selling it. This new image appeared to be powerful, because it was pictured as not only an image but also a dream that people could realise. The inspirational way in which the project of parks was communicated contributed to the rapid acceptance of the project at the metropolitan level.

However, from a local perspective, this research has identified a number of conflicts and tensions between communities and the municipal administration regarding local public spaces. The best known example is the case of ‘Luna Park’ neighbourhood where a number of residents stood behind a wall that was going to be demolished because it was enclosing a public space, and as a result of the confusion, there were a couple of fatalities during the demolition (Viviescas, 2001). This example shows how a project that has been internationally recognised and that has improved the public space of Bogotá collided with individual interests at the local level. This means that residents positively received the news that public space was going to be improved at the metropolitan level but when it came to their own parks, local communities were not willing to compromise their lifestyle for the benefit of the whole city.
The case of ‘Luna Park’ neighbourhood shows a number of factors influencing spatial practice in local areas. First, interviews in Villa and Niza showed that Bogotá residents have often perceived open public space as the ‘no one’s place’ and if public space does not have any kind of control it becomes a threat to their safety and security. Second, the Peñaloza administration emphasised the ‘democratisation’ of public space. This democratisation meant generating public space with the similar physical characteristics and equally accessible to all residents. The idea of democratisation of public space was a top-down approach from the government.

However, when people have to compromise their nearby local public space and make it accessible to everyone, then the idea of democratisation became a threat against the security of their neighbourhood. Some Bogotá residents seemed to be willing to accept changes that would not affect them directly. Thus, a key finding of this research is that the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project did not achieve many of their endeavours in the local and community levels, because the municipal government did not realised the best way to approach the concerns of local communities.

It was clear that public space should be public but the process of demolishing the barriers to public space, constructed by local communities, could have been approached in a more negotiated way. Better communication and consultation could have been used in these cases. The understanding that spatial practice involves social interactions, people’s beliefs, perceptions, and the way they use and think about their parks, would have contributed to finding a less harsh and more transitional ways to demolish these enclosures on public space. Furthermore, Niza Park shows that the destruction of barriers in public space was partially done since this park still has a fence, years after the project was implemented. This research has found that this lack of consistency, at the local level debilitated the strength of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ and opposed to the rationale of providing public space equally in all areas of the city.

7.3.1.2 Communication

‘Parks for learning how to live’ allocated more resources to constructing new parks in the most disadvantaged areas of the city. This decision was important for many
reasons. First, it improved the grid of public space in a more egalitarian way by reaching neighbourhoods in poor conditions throughout the city. Second, it provided disadvantaged people with appropriate scenarios for recreation and social interactions. Third, it reduced alienation by the provision of the necessary facilities in poor areas where residents have often been neglected by municipal governments and where communities have experienced difficult social conflicts.

The ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project was conceived as a change agent that could transform the way people live in Bogotá. As a large-scale transformation, it was massive, especially the physical transformation that was involved. A key finding of this research is that at a local scale, it encouraged a positive environment for communication and participation of the society with the municipal government, because when the parks were inaugurated there were a number of recreational and cultural activities that followed. Residents were generally satisfied because as in the case of Villa and other disadvantaged neighbourhoods, after years of struggle, they could finally see the action of the government and they felt empowered by it. The data from this research (analysed in Chapters 5 and 6) shows that several social tensions have diminished in poor areas such as Villa and potential for greater community development emerged.

However, communication emerged as a challenge during the implementation of the project. The historic negative image of the municipal administration among citizens was evident and was also founded in the long-term alienation of the disadvantaged parts of the society. Interviews from both parks reflect that people from low socio-economic status felt as if they did not exist for the government and people from high socio-economic status felt that the government was inept and that in order to get something done they had to use their connections and power.

In most levels of society, the image of the municipal administration was negative. This research found that ‘Parks for learning how to live’ changed the negative image towards the municipal government, in the sense that people realised that the government was able to provide residents with facilities and respond to their needs. ‘Parks for learning how to live’ also showed a significant improvement in urban management of Bogotá. Park users interviewed identified a slight increase of
opportunities for community participation, because the project initially involved local communities. It appears that from 1998 to 2002 there was a wave of motivation and appropriate communication between the administration and communities. However, data from 2004 fieldwork showed a decrease of community involvement.

The role of media was significant in terms of communicating the advances in the generation of public space, and the creation of new social dynamics (Jaramillo, 2003). However, this research has found that after 2002 the enthusiasm for maintaining diverse activities where government and residents were involved decreased significantly, because the municipal administration diminished communication and active involvement with communities. Furthermore, some initiatives that were locally applied lacked appropriate communication from administration and awareness from residents; there were misunderstandings that disrupted some of these processes. For example the initiative from Botanic Gardens for cutting non-native trees because they were detrimental to the soil (described in Chapter 6) was highly controversial, mainly because there was lack of public awareness of the purpose of the initiative.

7.3.1.3 Participation

Participation of the community has not been part of the urban governance in Bogotá historically. Just recently, some participatory initiatives have started to take place. For instance, during Mockus’ administration he allocated some funds for community development initiatives where communities could arrange a plan for improving their neighbourhoods with guidance from the municipality (Skinner, 2004). Apart from a few exceptions, participation is not part of the administrative tradition in Bogotá, but it is part of the plans of the past four administrations from 1996 until now.

Although there being a number of mechanisms for participation in Bogotá, they seem to be unevenly administered, and for that reason they have little reach in planning terms. This research found that the most important mechanism for participation and communication between municipal administration and communities is the neighbourhood association. Most neighbourhoods have one; some neighbourhood associations are more established than others. Villa and Niza neighbourhoods each have their own association. These associations address the problems of the neighbourhood and serve as a communication channel between the municipal
government and the local communities. Association to them is voluntary without salary, and generally its members are residents of the neighbourhood who develop a leadership role and have some sort of social commitment to their local community. In Villa and Niza, the neighbourhood association has taken the role of managing public space. Thus, both parks are controlled and maintained in part thanks to the neighbourhood association in each neighbourhood.

The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ served as a platform for neighbourhood associations to increase and improve their work in their local parks. Neighbourhood associations are the voice of the community and for that reason they constitute the bottom-up approach to local issues. In Villa for example the neighbourhood association has been active and has addressed the everyday problems of the community. However, after ‘Parks for learning how to live’, this neighbourhood association became more empowered and has conducted a number of civic activities that respond to the needs of various groups in the community. Examples of these activities are local school performances, soccer tournaments, and a children’s day. Since the construction of the park the neighbourhood association has been able to demonstrate the importance of their role for the park and in the neighbourhood. They have shown that they can manage local parks appropriately. Residents in this neighbourhood see the association as a necessary entity that contributes to the development of their community.

In Niza, the work of the neighbourhood association has been more difficult to carry out. Interestingly, these difficulties do not relate to the needs of the neighbourhood but to the lack of interest from residents in getting involved with the association. Niza Park is a priority for the association. They collect funds from residents periodically to pay for the private security, and general maintenance. The main struggle of this association, as expressed by its representative, is that many residents are indifferent to community engagement. She said that people from higher socio-economic status are more individualistic and perhaps that is the reason why this community seems uninterested in community engagement. However, many park users criticised the inefficiency of the municipal government in providing services. This research has found that some people in the communities studied believe that the government should provide parks and all other services, and that residents are only beneficiaries of
the services. This research has also found that community groups play an important role in securing better service provision from the government such as better parks. Community groups also play an important role in shaping parks according to their cultural beliefs, recreational needs and spatial practices. Some residents are not aware of this role in their own community and for that reasons they appear to be uninterested in neighbourhood associations or any other type of community engagement.

The mechanisms for participation in Bogotá have been growing in recent years. As noted in Chapter 3, nowadays there is a department from the office of the mayor in charge of neighbourhood associations. This department has educational workshops for participation, and programs for community development among other initiatives. This is a first step for improving local community development. However, association of communities is still dependent on the willingness of people to join and support their own neighbourhood associations. Perhaps if there were economic incentives such as funding for these organisations, residents could be more motivated to participate.

When comparing the data analysed in this research, it shows that neighbourhood associations from low socio-economic status areas are stronger and better established than the neighbourhood associations from high socio-economic status areas. This research has found that because of the strong socio-economic differences of Bogotá, the residents of poor areas are the most vulnerable, and for that reason their neighbourhood associations consolidate rapidly. This means that the consolidation of neighbourhood associations often occur out of necessity than because of willingness for community engagement.

The main problem in regards to participation is that to the extent that there are few participatory channels, participation generally only influences small-scale initiatives. Large scale projects such as ‘Parks for learning how to live’ rarely included participation in the early stages of development of the project. The urban planning process in Bogotá used to disregard or minimise participation of the community, and sometimes did not take into account the needs and expectations of local communities (Montezuma, 2005; Skinner, 2004). The planning process usually starts with reports from experts and is influenced by examples of international initiatives. For that reason at a metropolitan scale these type of projects are successful, but they do not reach the
grassroots, or the local communities, mainly because the lack of knowledge by the planners of the spatial practices of local communities.

There are a variety of community associations in Bogotá, which exist because of the voluntary willingness of their members. However, neighbourhood associations are among the most developed and formalised organisations in the city and appeared in this research because of their role in the sustainability of parks. The other associations, women’s, youth, etc., work more informally but at the same time are becoming increasingly important and the government is paying more attention to them. However, unlike the neighbourhood associations, these have a minor relationship with local public spaces.

### 7.3.2 Sustainability of parks

One of the opportunities that the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ generated was the conceptualisation and first formulation of a program for the sustainability of parks. This initiative was part of the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’. Chapter 3 explains the guidelines and characteristics of this initiative. Before the project of parks started, there were some mechanisms to maintain the most important parks of the city, but its reach was limited to metropolitan parks. This research found that the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project became the first real attempt to reorganise not only public space in the city but also to define how the administration could construct, develop and maintain parks. Furthermore during the implementation of this project, sustainability of parks was conceptualised, and implemented. At the metropolitan scale, the sustainability of parks has been successful. However, the sustainability of the grid of over 4 000 local parks is a more challenging objective that is still under development (Araujo, 2002; Beltran, 2002).

As discussed in Chapter 3, long-term sustainability of parks can only be achieved if it is implemented in an integrative manner. This means that a sustainability strategy should present guidelines for social, economic, cultural and environmental sustainability in an interconnected manner (Araujo, 2002; Beltran, 2002; Hurtado et al., 2003). This program emerges from the top-down or government approach to public space. The program for sustainability of parks involved partnerships with
communities for development of projects in the public space. Despite the fact that the
two communities investigated were not familiar with such partnerships, some of those
partnerships have been documented in the media and have taken place in other areas
of Bogotá. This research has found that the reach of the program for sustainability of
parks has not reached yet the local, neighbourhood level completely. For the program
of sustainability of parks to be effective it is necessary that most communities at least
know the available mechanisms to be able to participate in the program.

The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ has sought the involvement of the private
sector in the funding and maintenance of parks especially at the metropolitan level.
This top-down perspective from the municipal government acknowledges a social
strategy for the involvement of communities in the program. The social strategy
included participation of communities, education, communication and encouraging
sense of belonging or place attachment. This research has found that the way
sustainability has been formulated by the ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project
presents a number of advances, especially in regards to legislation, urban management
and governance. It was also found that the program for sustainability of parks is in an
early stage of development and have potential to grow at the local level.

For example, in Villa Park, people mentioned that there was a lot of cultural and sport
activities the beginning of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ after their park had recently
been built. In the second phase of fieldwork (2003-2004), park users mentioned that
the number and frequency of activities in the park organised by the municipal
administration decreased significantly. Villa Park users noted that they would like to
have those recreational activities again because they contributed to recreation of the
community. In Niza Park, the neighbourhood representative remembered an important
activity for community bonding with the park. It was a symbolic christening of the
park. The neighbourhood representative noted that this activity was very important in
the community, for encouraging community bonding and motivating interest in the
park and in community involvement.

This research has found that Villa and Niza users enjoyed the early activities that
‘Parks for learning how to live’ conducted in local parks. Villa and Niza park users
feel that the project activities have been terminated and that there is a lack of social
and cultural activities that they would like to participate in. This research also found that the two communities analysed appear to believe that guided recreation provided by the municipal government is the way to revitalise recreation and parks. Although these activities are positive and contribute to local communities, it is important that local communities embrace their active role in developing their own recreation following their needs and cultural beliefs. This research on spatial practice shows that communities have developed recreational activities creatively, their spatial practice is culturally rich and that their local parks are dynamic places. However, park users sometimes do not acknowledge what they have achieved.

The efforts of the government (top-down) and the community (bottom-up) are still in the process to integrate in a way that improves quality of urban life, participation, education and community and spatial growth. A key finding of the research is that approaches to social sustainability prove that even though participation is an ideal for both, communities and municipal administration, the political environment, governance and local culture has not been adapted to embrace participatory processes fully. Both parties, communities and municipal government, need to compromise and commit to each other in order to achieve an integrated strategy for sustainability of parks.

7.3.3 Citizens’ perspectives: ‘Bogotá how are we going’

The project, ‘Bogotá, how are we going’ was an independent initiative organised by one of the leading newspaper in the city El Tiempo and universities such as Los Andes University (El Tiempo, 2002). It incorporated mostly quantitative data about citizens’ perspectives; at the same time it included evaluations from experts on the issue of public space and discussed advances and setbacks in public space matters. Despite the fact that this study (El Tiempo, 2002) provided a metropolitan perspective to the evaluation of public space, it is a bottom-up approach because the evaluation was made by residents of Bogotá. Some residents had expertise on public space issues and others were users of public space. One important contribution of this study was that it provided a definition of what quality of life is in Bogotá and explored the role of
public space in improving quality of life. The issue of quality of life in Bogotá is discussed in Chapter 3.

This research has found that because quality of life is not universal and has a different meaning to different groups, local communities have different conceptualisations of good quality of life according to their socio-economic status. This research has found that the provision of adequate parks that contribute to the development of local communities’ unique spatial practice is necessary for achieving good quality of urban life in public space. If communities could be strengthened from within by highlighting their own values and appreciating their own spatial practice, they could become empowered. Perhaps empowered communities could integrate by sharing their differences with pride and respect instead of shame or prejudice, as it often seems to occur in the present.

Until recently, people from Bogotá have engaged in debates and critical analysis in regards to the urban development of the city at a metropolitan scale. Studies such as ‘Bogotá how are we going’ (El Tiempo, 2002) and the ‘Quality of life survey’ (Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion Distrital & Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadistica, 2005) present advances in the evaluation of municipal programs. However, the exploration of local issues has rarely been systematically explored from academic perspectives and in qualitative ways.

7.3.4 Local communities perspectives

At the beginning of this chapter we have discussed that each park has a special character or ‘personality’. This character evolves through spatial practice and shapes a cultural identification of the community that uses each park. This research found that spatial practice and cultural local identification are potentials of parks that influence quality of urban life in terms of recreation and local parks. If this cultural identification could generate pride and attachment in each community, that would be an indicator of good quality of life regardless of socio economic status.

Theories discussed in Chapter 2, notably those by Lefebvre, Dussel and Garcia Canclini highlighted the importance of the internal drive that comes within the society
to produce a real transformation. The research for this thesis has found that the bottom-up approaches from local communities are strong forces that continuously generate transformations in parks. Often, imposed ideals or prescriptions are not totally assimilated by communities and they do not get grounded in the local culture. However, the ethnographic study for this research shows that communities need support from the municipal government to be able to construct their own development, or in terms of ‘Philosophy of liberation’, to reach a new order. The transformation produced by programs such as the ‘Citizens’ culture’ and ‘Parks for learning how to live’ have contested old traditions such as intolerance and negative behaviours. Furthermore, these projects have been changing people’s behaviours to more convivial relationships with others in public space. There is large potential for further changes, but they depend on the sustainability of such initiatives and the degree of participation and communication between administration and communities.

An issue that has been little discussed in the literature on urban Latin America is that communities hold a tacit knowledge, they know their own needs, their ways of life and they usually have the drive to explore their potentials. Even in the context of socio-economic segregation, each community knows what is best and most suitable for their neighbourhood and their local park. However, as this research also reveals the creation of community is difficult. As individuals from different age groups, park users in both neighbourhoods have positive ideas and accurate criticisms about their spatial practice. They just have not had the opportunity to share and build upon on their tacit knowledge, and many would like to have those possibilities. In order to generate spaces for communication and construction of community identity it may be necessary to offer tasks where neighbours need to get together, giving them the freedom to express their ideas.

Chapters 5 and 6 present in detail how spatial practice occurred in Villa and Niza Parks. The issues analysed in these Chapters provided depth and knowledge in terms of spatial practice. This research has found that park users in Villa and Niza neighbourhoods use their parks on daily basis and in that way they have developed a sense of the park and a sense of the role of the park in their lives. Park users, without having expertise in urban studies or about public space, have very important insights about their spatial practice in local parks, which contributed greatly to this research.
The qualitative exploration of this research is necessary and may contribute to better knowledge of challenging situations in terms of local public space. This bottom-up understanding could be instrumental to municipal government organisations in the formulation and implementation of initiatives.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the findings of this research regarding comparison of the spatial practice in Villa and Niza Parks and the local understanding of government initiatives, specifically ‘Parks for learning how to live’. Chapters 5 and 6 addressed the way in which spatial practice occurred in Villa and Niza Parks.

In the comparisons section the main findings include: the identification of unique and special character of each park and the comparisons of the relationships between people and the space across both parks. This comparison is founded on the assumption that people from different socio-economic status have different approaches to recreation and local parks. The two cases studies have shown that there are a number of similarities on how spatial practice occurs in these two parks. On the other hand there are a number of differences that contest the way we understand spatial practice in local parks. While Villa Park resembles a rural town plaza in which social interactions, high use, and a wide variety of activities that surpass the recreational experience take place. Niza Park resembles a landscape like, quiet, and relaxing retreat where the quality of the vegetation and natural environment are more important than many of the activities that take place in this park.

The second section examining the connection between top-down perspectives and bottom-up understanding shows that the latest municipal administration have improved in terms of urban management and have worked efficiently at a metropolitan scale. However, the scope from the bottom-up has not been adequately developed in administrative practices and structures. It seems there is a gap between the metropolitan and the local levels in regards to communication, participation and urban development. The more that knowledge can be developed from the bottom-up perspective represents the reduction of the gap between the metropolitan level and the local level.
The next chapter examines the main conclusions for this research in relation to the three key themes. The first theme is the occurrence of spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá, its implications in urban lifestyles, community development and quality of life. The second theme is the comparison of the two parks investigated according to their different socio-economic status. The third theme is how the bottom-up approaches from the community relate to the top-down approaches from the government, and how community perceived ‘Parks for learning how to live’.
Chapter 8: Spatial practice in parks, constructing conviviality and more liveable cities
8.1 Introduction

The analysis of spatial practice in parks presented in this research has identified a number of key elements. Spatial practice involves different scales and relationships between stakeholders. In terms of scale, there are the regional, metropolitan, and local, or neighbourhood scales. In terms of involvement and relationships there are groups such as government, scholars and experts, private sponsors, communities, community associations, and age groups. In terms of urban space, the physical space of the park has been identified as an entity that plays an active role in spatial practice by influencing social perceptions and behaviours and at the same time is continuously changing in time. Time is another significant element of spatial practice because spatial practice is a process in continuous evolution.

This research emphasised the way two local communities in Bogotá have developed spatial practice in their parks. This analysis was instrumental for gathering local and tacit knowledge related to parks, including different understandings and interpretations of parks reflected in the ways local residents experience leisure and recreation. As seen in Chapters 2 and 3, local knowledge or bottom-up understanding has often been overlooked in urban planning (Arango, 1989; Armus & Lear, 1998; Buraglia, 1998; Cadavid, 1993; Carr et al., 1992). However, in Bogotá, government agencies, especially in the last decade, have increased awareness of the relevance of such a perspective for urban planning. Empirical research is the tool that best contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of spatial practice and in that way generates a background for participatory mechanisms in urban planning.
This chapter specifically presents the conclusions of the three main themes studied throughout this research, namely, spatial practice in local parks, socio-economic differences across local parks, and the evaluation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ in the local level. The first and more detailed theme investigated in this research was how spatial practice occurs in two local parks of Bogotá. The findings in regards to this theme identified the different ways people from different age groups use and understand their local park as well as the different recreational needs park users have. It also showed that the perceptions and interpretations regarding public space and parks influence the ways park users shape and recreate their public space and how local public space evolves in time.

The second theme investigated was how different socio-economic status shape spatial practice in local parks. Chapter 7 showed that local parks have unique characterisation; this research believes that this uniqueness is largely influenced by socio-economic status. It is important to identify the possible opportunities that socio-economic differences can offer to urban planning and management in Bogotá.

The third theme analysed the bottom-up understandings, from local communities, about parks and public space and evaluate the suitability of top-down approaches, from the municipal government. This analysis of a balance between these two perspectives is relevant in a tradition where only the top-down approach has been used, and participatory processes are more part of the urban planning discourses than the practice. At the same time, participatory processes seem imminent and necessary, for that reason the unexplored world of the local context needs to come to the surface at this point in time. The structure of this chapter follows the three main themes studied that at the same time relate directly with the three research questions of this study:

- How do the reciprocal interactions between parks and communities shape spatial practice, and urban public life in two neighbourhood parks in Bogotá?
• How does socio-economic status impact upon spatial practice, and urban public life in these two neighbourhood parks?

• Has the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ adequately responded to spatial practice in local parks by addressing and fulfilling park users’ needs?

8.2 Research Question 1: Spatial practice in local parks of Bogotá

Chapter 2 analysed the conceptualisation of spatial practice and provide theoretical underpinnings to examined spatial practice empirically. The research for this thesis contributed to identify how spatial practice occurs in local parks of Bogotá. Because spatial practice refers to the evolution of socio-spatial relationships on everyday basis, this research found this theoretical underpinning useful to this specific research. The conclusions in regards to the first research question extend in four themes, first the adaptation of the concept of ‘spatial practice’ to Latin American urban space and specifically local parks in Bogotá; Second the identification of the uniqueness of local parks; third the need for urban, spatial and social flexibility of local parks; fourth the identification of potentials of local parks for improving conviviality, good use and good quality of urban life.

8.2.1 The understanding of spatial practice in this research

Spatial practice is a holistic phenomenon because the relationships between its parts, spatial and social elements are indivisible. However, it can be examined in its parts for analytical purposes; in practice it is understood as an integrative phenomenon. Spatial practice is formed by the interactions and relationships between people in space and between space and people. For that reason, issues of administration of space, social engagement, use of space, sense of belonging, perception of the space, memories, political, economic, and cultural issues play an important indivisible role in spatial practice. Lefebvre (1991) proposes a spatial triad where spatial practice is one
of the constitutive elements. The three elements are interrelated without any distinction; they have no specific hierarchy and the three elements are complementary. While Lefebvre did not put this model into a diagrammatic form, we can visualise it as such (see Figure 8.1).

![Visual representation of Lefebvre’s spatial triad](image1.png)

The research for this thesis has used the spatial triad as a theoretical underpinning specially focusing on spatial practice. As a result this research has identified that spatial practice as the central element of the triad where the other two elements (representations of space and representational space) are reflected and contested. While spatial practice refers to the sensorial and material experience, the other two elements refer to intangible ideas that shape spatial practice. ‘Representations of space’ refers to the relations between lived space and conceptual frameworks, for instance the approaches of urban planners and municipal administration constitute representations of space. ‘Representational space’, on the other hand, refers to spaces lived through associated images and symbols of other spaces such as memories, dreams, and past experiences (see figure 8.2).

![Hierarchy of spatial practice identified in the research for this thesis](image2.png)
Figure 8.2 depicts the way in which Lefebvre’s spatial triad was adopted in this research by establishing spatial practice as the central element. In the research for this thesis, spatial practice has a higher hierarchy because it is the part of the triad that reflects and combines the three elements, the actual sensorial experience, the memories and dreams attached to space, and the conceptual frameworks generated from the understanding of the physical space. Lefebvre (1974) understands the triad as holistic and homogeneous; this research understands the triad as hierarchical, in which spatial practice is the most relevant and tangible part.

This research adopted the concept of spatial practice in the way Lefebvre (1974) defined it. However, after having contested this theory empirically (in the fieldwork) this research realised that in the phenomenon of the production of space, spatial practice has a hierarchy because it addresses the issues concerning the sensorial world. The other two concepts of the triad ‘representations of space’ and ‘representational space’ emerged in this research as part of ‘spatial practice’ for that reason, spatial practice is the most relevant part of the triad. In a more empirical approach, the analysis of spatial practice in parks depicts a number of specific conclusions related to the nature of public space, local communities and parks, the following conclusions come from the analysis and findings.

8.2.2 The unique characterisation of local parks

This research found that local parks have a unique character, which reflects the communities that use them. The municipal administrations of Bogotá, despite of their continuous improvement since the late 1990s, have pursued a model of planning that does not involve the community in early stages. The analysis in this research shows that, not withstanding municipal administration many community-oriented programs; the municipal administration has a top-down approach to management that considers the administration is offering services to people. However, the nature of those services has not been analysed in depth. Services such as education, health, transport, and public space appear to be considered as inert non-dynamic services that should be provided. However, those services are whole systems that respond to different
influences, that impact upon people, and that are in nature dynamic and difficult to control.

The municipal administrations have understood public space and parks as physical spaces only. However, as this research showed in the case of local parks, they are more complex entities that acquire independent evolution through use. This evolution constitutes a process, in which parks acquire an active role in influencing people’s perceptions and behaviours as well as people’s use transform parks. For that reason, the construction and creation of public space and parks needs to incorporate a more integrative understanding. They are for the use of people but at the same time they are ‘living things’ that need to respond to people’s needs at the same time that public space influences users. This means that local parks can be considered ‘urban artefacts’ because their spatial practice gives them specific characteristics that make them unique. They also evolve in time with the change of their architectural form from renovations and urban design.

This research can conclude that local parks play an active role in the development and evolution of people’s everyday lives. They are centres for local communities to interact. They are also centres that encourage community engagement. In the context of Bogotá, as the data from this research has shown, there are few public community spaces citizens count on, and very few spaces to interact with their closest community apart from local parks. It is clear that most communities regard their local parks highly and understand their importance in contributing to individual and community lifestyles.

This research established a direct link between the importance of parks among users and the unique characteristics that they display. This research recognised that the recreational use of parks generate a number of supporting activities; maintenance, management, other activities that support recreation such as commercial activity, civic involvement, partnerships, shared used by schools and community groups, among others.

More importantly parks serve as a place that can integrate local communities. The fact that communities consider parks such important places for sharing is vital for
encouraging communities to reunite. The communities studied often get together in order to improve their conditions of living, using the park as a meeting point, as a scenario for entertainment, and as a place they can use to raise funds. In fact, this research found that there are already a number of public and private initiatives in the communities studied that take place in or around the park. For instance the police trailer is located in Villa Park every day but its jurisdiction reaches the whole neighbourhood. The trailer is located in the park because the park is a point of reference for residents. The office of the local representatives is also located in front of the park. Furthermore, there has been in the city an initiative to take mobile libraries to neighbourhoods, in which children and youth can go to read, do their homework and learn. These mobile libraries are often placed in local parks because they are the reference point of most neighbourhoods (Secretaria de Educacion de Bogota, 2001).

8.2.3 The need for flexibility of design of local parks

This research recognised that local communities in Bogotá, despite their diverse origins and backgrounds have developed cultural identity as local communities. It also appears that this cultural identity develops and evolves in the local park and through spatial practice. This identification to the neighbourhood and to the park is what we referred earlier as the character, ‘personality’ or ‘locus’ of the park. However, within communities there are a variety of subgroups that have different recreational needs and different approaches to leisure and recreation. This research has addressed the analysis of age groups, although, as park users noted, there are formal and informal groups within the community which were not studied in this research but which exist and develop continuously inside and outside the parks.

The spatial practice of the parks studied in this research includes a large number of activities that are particular and innovative. For example, the data from this research recorded activities such as dogs’ shows in one park and training roosters for fights in the other. Furthermore, park users expressed that they want to have a larger variety of activities that involve arts, performance, music, celebrations, and religious ceremonies, among others. A park that accommodates a large variety of activities represents a challenge for architectural design and urban management. But the
challenge is worthwhile if the park is responding and contributing to community
development and improving the quality of urban life.

The architect and municipal government representative interviewed explained that the
process of park design and construction did not involve community consultation.
Furthermore, the design guidelines presented to architects were very specific during
‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. Again, the process of design and construction
of parks reflected the top-down approach from the city management. Future design
and construction of parks needs to consider the uniqueness of local parks to be able to
create appropriate architectural design that facilitates flexibility of use. Local parks
need to have spatial flexibility for the practice of a number of activities that are not
limited to sports or traditional ways of recreation.

8.2.4 Unexplored potentials of local parks

The analysis of spatial practice in two local parks of Bogotá has brought to the surface
the variety of activities that park users engage in, plus a number of different
perceptions about parks, recreation, and other cultural characteristics that have been in
constant evolution. For example, in Niza Park, people perceive their park as a
landscape for quiet recreation, more so than a place for sports. In contrast Villa users
perceive their park as a place that accommodates all types of activities that they
engage in, from sports to civic meetings. That is, Villa Park users perceive their park
more as a town plaza. When taking into account these local experiences, which have
been little observed and analysed in the existing research, it is evident that local parks
have the potential for a wider range of activities, not only recreational and leisure
activities. At the same time, this research shows that other types of uses of parks are
actually happening without having been predicted or planned for before the ‘Parks for
learning how to live’ project started.

Park users, in both Villa and Niza mentioned that they would like to have art, civic,
religious and cultural activities, in their park. One of the potentials of local parks that
emerged from the data is the ability of the park to be a pedagogic place or a place for
educational purposes. The communities studied already know this, but the municipal
administration has not identified this potential yet, or if they have, they have not used
parks for this purpose. Activities such as environmental campaigns, cleaning days and schools having sports classes in the park, which have been conducted by the communities of Villa and Niza, explicitly show this potential.

Furthermore, other studies from the ‘Citizen’s culture’ program have identified the educational potential especially in terms of citizens’ tolerance (Mockus, 2002). Mockus’ study explained that when people share parks, they are able to observe others and interrelate with others in an environment of respect and social awareness. People tend to be more tolerant and avoid confrontation in parks because of the relaxed nature of parks. Another reason is the fact that they are being observed and they want maintain a level of social acceptance. These findings from Mockus’ study have been confirmed in the data from this research. For example, the police officer interviewed, who is in charge of the security of Villa neighbourhood, expressed that the most common security problem is domestic violence, and that only occurs inside houses, never in the park. The fact that people seem more tolerant and convivial in their parks corroborates that the park is a space where people generally exercise tolerance. Therefore, parks could be used to encourage tolerance and other social good uses and behaviours in parks.

A sense of belonging and place attachment are important values for local communities. Despite the fact that this research does not address these themes specifically, they emerged as elements that relate to spatial practice in parks. Parks have the potential for improving and increasing a sense of belonging and place attachment because people relate to them on daily basis and through extended periods of time. Moreover, sense of belonging and place attachment are encouraged by the belief from communities that their park is a vital part of their lives. The data shows that the interaction between parks and people generates special cases where people attach feelings to parks, change perceptions about parks and transform negative behaviours over time. For example in Villa Park, a process of negotiation between gang members and neighbourhood representatives originated from the construction of adequate facilities in the park. The negotiation aimed to stop gangs from vandalising the park and it has been successful since then. This potential, however, does not seem to relate directly to the frequency of use but to the way socio-spatial relations evolve in parks. It is an issue of quality of the socio-spatial relationships rather than the
quantity or frequency of use of the park. The quality of these relationships is dependent on management and continuous social and spatial development of parks.

Another potential of local parks is that they are a place to initiate participatory processes. Local parks are priority to several neighbourhood associations. Because the local park constitutes such an important centre in the life of neighbourhoods, people appear to get motivated to engage in community involvement. As the data from this research showed, park users tend to participate in activities that relate to the park because they appear to be informal or with low level of commitment and they are for recreational purposes. However, according to the data, this research found that in both parks, current participation and community involvement is still deficient to cover communities’ needs and expectations. Usually a small number of committed people maintain these associations but they usually criticize the level of support they have from both the community and the municipal administration. Strong associations are key communication channels that contribute to better urban initiatives in local areas. Thus, the park presents this potential that needs to be explored for the benefit of the communities, the parks themselves and the city in general.

8.3 Research question 2: Comparison of parks according to socio-economic differences

The reason for doing a comparative study of two parks across different socio-economic status is because Bogotá, as the majority of cities in Latin America, have developed strong socio-economic and spatial segregation since the Spanish colonisation, as described in Chapters 2 and 3. In Bogotá the spatial, social and economic segregation is strong and citizens clearly recognise where the wealthy and the poor live and they rarely interact. For that reason, this theme needs to be analysed more in depth and understood from a local perspective and find new ways to deal with socio-economic segregation.
8.3.1 Socio-economic and spatial segregation, dealing with its impacts

The negative aspects of segregation have been extensively discussed in the literature (Silva, 1998; Tolosa, 1991; Valladares & Coelho, 1995; Viviescas, 2001). However there are other impacts of this spatial segregation in communities that are only emerging from the local understandings. In local parks, arguably communities have the possibility to evolve by themselves, with high levels of freedom. This evolution involves the development of practices that identify them as a community and in a metropolitan scale contribute to the cultural richness of the city. This cultural local identification is important to improve a sense of belonging and own appreciation of communities regardless their economic background.

The fact that local communities have been isolated from each other has created a diversity of hybrid cultures. These hybrid cultures have developed largely in and around their public space and through spatial practice. Hybrid cultures have been mainly identified in industrialised cities as these cities have received large numbers of immigrants from different cultural regions. When they have to interrelate between cultural groups a cultural shock is usually one of the outcomes. However, throughout time, these groups start mixing their cultural practices with the practices of other cultural groups and that becomes the beginning of hybridity.

Bogotá is not a multicultural city in the sense of having immigrants from other regions of the world. Immigrants that have arrived in Bogotá, usually come from smaller cities in Colombia and rural areas. However, the way they develop, separated by socio-economic groups, recreates a similar process where each socio-economic group starts developing its own identity in the city. This new identity develops through the mixture of rural backgrounds, media influences, and the often limited but continuous exchanges between different socio-economic groups. Nowadays, a number of hybrid cultures have developed in Bogotá and a feature that distinguishes them is their socio-economic status. For instance youth groups from low-income neighbourhoods tend to develop subcultures that include ‘Hip-Hop’ music, specific fashion styles and activities such as break dancing. On the other hand, groups from wealthier neighbourhoods tend to dress with expensive labels, go to sports clubs and
play sports that in Bogotá are related to high socio-economic status such as tennis and golf.

The concept of quality of life is relative because residents’ needs change among different socio-economic status in Bogotá. It is clear that the basic services should be provided to all residents of the city regardless of their economic possibilities. Despite the fact that people from Bogotá share the same city, the lifestyles from the wealthy and the disadvantaged are greatly different. For instance, the vegetation of the two parks analysed are quite different, and Niza has more established vegetation than Villa. However, the majority of users in both parks considered that they have a park with excellent vegetation. Villa residents were used to using a vacant plot as park and perhaps that is the reason why they are satisfied with the quality of vegetation of their park. The vegetation from Villa Park is limited and trees are very young in contrast to the well-established vegetation from Niza. However, it does not mean that Niza Park is better than Villa Park; they are just different in terms of vegetation.

This example demonstrates that the conditions of Bogotá residents vary in different areas of the city and for that reason, quality of urban life is difficult to define. The criteria for improving quality of life in Bogotá start with the equal provision of basic services in all parts of the city. The attempt of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project to democratise public space by improving public space in poor areas of the city generated a more homogeneous structure of public space, therefore, more democratised public space. At the metropolitan level this homogenisation and the provision of services in a more equalitarian way is necessary. However, this research has found that the homogenisation of public space needs to incorporate the notion that local parks must also be spatially flexible to accommodate particular uses.

Despite the fact that the socio-economic differentiation of groups presents a number of problems at both the metropolitan and the local levels, this research has identified that there are some positive outcomes that emerged from this differentiation. Wealthy residents have more access to entertainment because they can afford paying for many services. In contrast, residents in a position of economic disadvantage can only entertain in ways that do not cost money. For that reason local parks are their first option for leisure, recreation and entertainment. In that way parks are places that
allow communities to develop leisure subcultures such as, break-dancing groups, Hip-hop youth groups, cockfighting fanatics, dog shows fanatics, among other groups. These subcultures contribute to the cultural richness of Bogotá because when visiting these parks, despite the fact that they all look similar physically, the ambience and scenery are dynamic and diverse. The problem is that residents of Bogotá rarely visit or are aware of areas from different socio-economic status.

The strong socio-economic segregation of Bogotá emphasises the isolation of communities. This isolation has always been surrounded by social tension, which is directly related to the inequality in the distribution of opportunities and services. This segregation is more evident in environments where people have to coexist, for example in the workplace. Local parks are not specifically places where different socio-economic groups have to coexist, however, because they are public spaces, parks are open to all residents of the city.

For example, Niza Park users pay high attention to how park users look like and if they are neighbours or ‘strangers’. A specific group of users interviewed, and identified as visitors, not residents of Niza, said that residents of this neighbourhood sometimes made them feel uncomfortable because they did not belong to the same socio-economic group as the local residents. On the other hand, many Niza Park users who live in the neighbourhood mentioned that they dislike the presence of people who are not residents of Niza because ‘strangers’ are seen as untrustworthy people. Niza residents often related insecurity issues to park users who they thought came from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It is an interesting preconception because observations showed that it is difficult to identify the social status of park users. Residents from Niza neighbourhood think they can identify ‘strangers’ and they do not trust them. Some Niza residents think that because they contribute to maintain the park, they have more rights over this public space than residents of other neighbourhoods. Park users in Villa did not express such feelings of insecurity related to park users from other neighbourhoods despite the fact that there seems to be more problems in terms of delinquency. In interviews, park users from Villa mentioned that they were concerned of the security in the park, especially at night, but they did not say who assume who the delinquents could be.
The data shows that while Niza has 24-hour private surveillance, Villa has protection from the metropolitan police from 9 am to 10 pm. Some people expressed that Villa Park is dangerous at night because it is dark and there is no surveillance. It was identified in Chapter 7 that this lack of trust from Niza users seems to be based more on social misconceptions rather than facts. Niza residents appear to be afraid of people stealing their possessions; they mentioned that sometimes robbers could pretend being park visitors to spy on people and organise robberies. Residents from Niza have a shared security alarm that can be activated from any house or from the park.

Security is an important issue in public space in Bogotá. However, it is important to generate ways to deal with security without excluding citizens. If place attachment to local parks is strengthened, it may be possible to begin initiatives that encourage exchanges between communities of different socio-economic status and contribute to alleviate the negative preconceptions and feelings between social groups.

8.3.2 Parks as generators of social change

As discussed in Chapter 2, the ‘Philosophy of liberation’ is founded on the idea that Latin America has, since the Spanish colonisation, been a dominated region and culture (Dussel, 1995, 1996). This means that discourses of development do not apply to Latin America because they are transitional rather than transformative. Instead a major transformation that brings the region to a ‘new order’ is necessary. At a more specific level, parks are sometimes considered as neglected or dominated spaces, because private urban space is the dominant space. For that reason public space tends to be excluded in a system where private interests, private investments and private space are more important than public space.

At the same time, Lefebvre’s theories emphasise that transformations only occur when originated within the society, and when transformations are imposed they have little chance to succeed. Thus, if initiatives that aim to transform socio-spatial relationships are expected to succeed, they should include the bottom-up perspective of local communities from their formulation to the end of the initiative. The researcher believes that parks are potential scenarios for the construction of social
initiatives that involve communities from the beginning, therefore, can contribute to social transformations.

Spatial practice can be strengthened and supported in local parks, and in that way it can empower communities. If communities were empowered by increasing their sense of belonging to an appreciation for the area they live in, it would be beneficial to the quality of life of neighbourhoods, regardless of wealth. It is also beneficial for future exchanges between communities. Activities such as inter-neighbourhood tournaments or cultural gatherings can expand the dynamism of parks and help communities from different socio-economic status to interact. Based on the examination of the data for this research it is possible to conclude that if communities of different socio-economic status were able to share sports, leisure, and cultural and recreational activities together without prejudice, these communities could break down social barriers and produce real social change. Despite the fact that this social change has not occurred yet, this research acknowledges that there is potential for it.

Initiatives that aim to diminish the social barriers between residents and improve social conditions are few but not inexistent. During Peñaloza’s government, for instance, there was a project where private wealthy secondary schools ‘adopted’ and took care of public schools from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The adopting institutions provided high quality teaching, teaching material, uniforms and volunteer work in the most marginal schools of the city. This initiative encouraged a philanthropic approach among wealthy students and improved the educational conditions of a number of schools in marginalised areas. Moreover, wealthy and disadvantaged students had the opportunity to learn from one another to accept their differences and interact without prejudice. The ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project outlined similar processes in which the private sector could ‘adopt’ parks in poor areas where there was no possibility to be maintained by the community, in exchange for tax relief. However, this research found that this is happening in larger scale parks such as metropolitan and district parks but not in neighbourhood parks.

‘Parks for learning how to live’ began a spatial revolution in the metropolitan level. The success of this initiative has surpassed any other previous initiative because of its magnitude and reach. Furthermore ‘Parks for learning how to live’ initiated a number
of other initiatives that in the long term will ensure the sustainability of the structure of parks in the city. Some of the initiatives originated from or after ‘Parks for learning how to live’ include: initiatives from ‘Human city organisation’ for the creation and improvement of bicycle paths as models for alternative mobility in the city (Hurtado et al., 2003).

The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ had a technocratic, top-down approach that aimed for a physical improvement of parks. Despite its limitations, this approach provided a framework to generate a shift or a social transformation at the local level, specifically, an improved sense of local identification with and use of their parks. In this context, Dussel’s ‘Philosophy of liberation’ is instrumental to understand the social transformation in relation to local parks (Dussel, 1996). An interpretation based on Dussel, therefore, contends that the parks project served as the generator of the conditions for change, however the social change only emerged from the willingness of the local community in transforming certain aspects of their spatial practices. The example of the youth gangs from Villa, discussed in Chapter 5, is evidence of one of these social transformations. These gangs participated in a dialogue with the community, stopped their vandalism and subsequently started sharing the park facilities with other users. This process shows one of these social transformations that occurred in this park after the top-down implementation of the parks’ project but also, importantly, through the community’s spatial practices.

On the other hand, these small social changes occurred in specific ways within each park and each community. The wealthy and the disadvantaged have not shared their local public space at the neighbourhood level. Despite the fact that the potential for inter-class sharing of public space is present, parks have not appeared to reduce socio-economic segregation. In this context Dussel’s ideas cannot be identified with local social transformations. However, the significance of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ should not be underestimated in terms of improvement to urban management and governance and to some extent the spatial practice of local communities in Bogotá.
8.4 Research question 3: Evaluation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ in a local perspective

The tradition of top-down urban planning in the city has generated a number of planning incoherencies that at the metropolitan level are sometimes imperceptible but that make a difference at the local level. Top-down approaches are usually conceived in the metropolitan large scale. Sometimes top-down approaches look at the short-term sustainability and are based on experiences from other regions, which are many times, inappropriately adapted. Without excluding top-down approaches in urban initiatives, it is necessary to find a balance between bottom-up understandings from communities and top-down approaches from municipal governments. The bottom-up understandings provide the tacit, local knowledge necessary for sustainable urban planning. At the same time the bottom-up understanding is not only a view or perspective but also a tool for governments to tackle social problems by facilitating participation, decreasing alienation and building cities from the grassroots. This section addresses the impacts of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ at the local level, sustainability of park and communication between municipal governments and local communities.

8.4.1 Local impacts of ‘Parks for learning how to live’

The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ has been significant to the development of urban management in Bogotá and the improvement of the spatial and social structures. This project has been the ‘top-down’ initiative that has generated greater physical transformation in Bogotá in the last four years. Its international recognition demonstrates that the project has been innovative and that its impacts have transcended the reach of previous initiatives. The image of this project among Bogotá residents has also been positive. It is important to emphasise that this project counted on very well developed media coverage and that there has been a number of examinations of this project that ratify its convenience, good timing and success (Araujo, 2002; El Tiempo, 2002; Mockus, 2002; Penaloza, 2001; Urbana en Linea Consejo Editorial, 2001). The research for this thesis acknowledges that part of the success of this project was its conjunction with the previous initiative from the mayor Mockus: ‘Citizens’ culture’. This prior initiative generated an important social
transformation in people’s attitudes towards a more tolerant, understanding, and less violent behaviour in community. It seems that the social change from ‘Citizens’ culture’ acquired the appropriate spatial setting with ‘Parks for learning how to live’ to continue an improvement in the conviviality of residents of Bogotá.

The ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project produced positive outcomes in the metropolitan level with the significant improvement in urban governance, the establishment of a grid of parks, bicycle paths, boulevards and other types of public space. However, when the project is observed in more detail specifically in the local level, the gaps or shortcomings of the project became evident.

In the first stages of the development of the project, local parks received great attention. Some were renovated or restored, but many of them where newly designed and constructed. Administrative mechanisms were created for ensuring their maintenance, a project for sustainability was in place and a large number of guided recreational activities took place in local parks. However, after some time and with the decline in publicity about the project, local parks started to have problems in terms of maintenance and the guided recreational activities decreased significantly. Spatial practice in local parks is a naturally occurring phenomenon that does not have to be enforced by administration, however it can be guided and improved. This research has evaluated the project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ in terms to its impacts on spatial practice. If knowledge of the spatial practice in local parks could be introduced at early stages of urban initiatives, such initiatives could be more successful and long lasting. Thus, qualitative research on socio-spatial relationships is highly relevant for urban planning and urban development.

The examination of spatial practice in parks reveals that communities are not only recipients of services. Communities are active entities that create their own spatial practices and their own community development. They need more involvement and commitment at the same time that they need more respect and attention from the municipal government. In a city where urban management tends to be weak, community work and participation can be a solution to improve urban management. Residents of Bogotá need to be encouraged to participate in the construction of their own local and metropolitan surroundings and lifestyles. Active community
engagement and collaboration with the municipal government in urban initiatives can improve significantly the success of urban initiatives and urban management in the city.

In sum, despite the national and international success of ‘Parks for learning how to live’, it had a number of shortcomings at the local level. The first shortcoming is that it did not involve the participation of community during its formulation and development. The second limitation of the project is that it misused and misunderstood the local dynamics of parks use or spatial practices. The third shortcoming is that it lacked vision to promote educational, cultural, artistic and civic activities that encourage a sense of belonging at the local level.

### 8.4.2 Sustainability of parks

Sustainability of parks has been a challenging issue before, during and after the execution of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project. It seems that sustainability of parks is still a project in its earliest development. The first important step to embrace long-term sustainability is to identify the theoretical and conceptual issues driving sustainability. This research has found that the guidelines used by the municipal administration are a solid rationale for the definition of sustainability. The ‘Parks for learning how to live’ project perceived the issue of sustainability as an integrative matter where the involvement of different variables and stakeholders are key for its success; they also understood that any project for sustainability has to be long-term.

The main problem limiting the success of a sustainability program was the translation of the ideas and conceptualisations about sustainability into practice. This research has found that successful sustainability of parks has to involve a holistic approach to social, cultural, environmental, political, administrative and economic sustainability. Thus, any mechanism used for the sustainability of parks needs to be analysed under all these variables. For instance, one of the ideas of the Municipal Administration is to attract private sponsors that pay for the maintenance of parks in exchange of some tax benefits and some rights over the park. This mechanism has to be studied considering impacts such as the willingness of the community to have sponsors, or the interests of sponsors in relation to incorporating new activities in the park or generating profit,
and the environmental impact of this strategy. If the aim of having a private sponsor is only economic and there is little benefit in other aspects of sustainability it is not likely to be a long-term strategy for sustainability of the park.

Sustainability of parks is an integrative strategy that should be implemented after understanding its impacts to all stakeholders and taking into consideration that it matches the spatial practices of parks. The issue of sustainability relates to the evaluation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ because the project created the first integrative strategy for sustainability of parks. Therefore, the sustainability program is part of the criteria for evaluating ‘Parks for learning how to live’. However, the data showed that this program is still in early stages and it is highly dependent on the continuity of the strategies and the formulation of clear goals that are maintain over time.

8.4.3 Communication between municipal administration and local communities

Involving the community in participatory initiatives is a necessary step to incorporate to the urban management of Bogotá. Research in other regions, especially USA has shown a large number of positive outcomes arising from the involvement of community in urban management (Baron, Clark, Robinson, Ainsworth, & Labriola, 1989; Urban Parks Institute, 1996, 1998). However, the municipal administration of Bogotá has taken a long time in creating mechanisms and much longer in actually applying them. Communication between the municipal administration and communities is an issue emerging from the third research question, which addresses the evaluation of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ at the local level.

This research has explored a number of potentials in terms of the role of parks in improving conviviality and urban quality of life. The bottom-up understanding studied in this research assumes that communities have knowledge, wisdom, experience and commitment to their local area. These positive characteristics could be used to the advantage of the urban management of Bogotá. What is necessary is to create communication channels for the direct interaction between the administration and local communities. These communication channels have to respond to the needs
of people and for that reason the availability of more research is important. Shaping a comprehensive understanding on how local communities develop is necessary to create mechanisms for participation. This communication has to occur in both directions, from the municipal administration to the community by offering support, and from the community to the administration by expressing their needs and showing commitment.

8.5 Methodological issues

The exploration of spatial practice in cities presents a great potential for more urban ethnographic work. Ethnographic work in the context of Bogotá and urban Latin America has great potential for development. Most urban initiatives in Latin America are the result of management reports or general studies that are informative but lack qualitative depth. REAP as well as other methodologies within the qualitative paradigm are appropriate for gathering data about the tacit knowledge of local communities and issues related to the urban dynamics. REAP facilitated gathering data of the same reality of local parks from different perspectives of stakeholders.

At a metropolitan scale, and for the purposes of comparison of Bogotá’s communities, it seems necessary to generate methodological approaches that combine quantitative and qualitative data. It is important to produce census data specific to leisure, recreation, and public space in combination with qualitative data that can provide in-depth understanding of the socio-spatial relations in public space in the city. There are quantitative studies recently developed or under way however they could be enriched with qualitative approaches that can make sense of the quantitative data from the perspective of the everyday life at the local level.

REAP has demonstrated to be instrumental in the gathering of qualitative data in public space of Bogotá. However, research has demonstrated that REAP can also generate data that combines quantitative and qualitative perspectives. REAP involve a combination of methodologies that are flexible and can be adapted to a number of scenarios. The flexibility of REAP is another quality that was instrumental to this research because it permitted the data gathering to be unobtrusive at the same time that it had appropriate depth and breadth. This occurred mainly because of the
possibility to combine ethnographic methods that were appropriate to the specific field of local parks in Bogotá. REAP can be used by government organisations and consulting groups because it involves a rapid timeframe that suit research teams that need rapid implementation of recommendations. REAP has been successfully conducted in public space in the United States, an example is the research conducted in Independence Historical Park, in Philadelphia (Taplin et al., 2002). The interdisciplinary nature of REAP is another benefit to this research because it provided perspectives from different fields that impact upon urban studies. Through this methodological approach multidisciplinary view could be integrated.

Methodologically, the interdisciplinary perspective embraced in this research was beneficial to this study in a number of ways. Issues directly related to urban management and governance were studied within a socio-spatial perspective in which fields of architecture, anthropology, sociology and environment and behaviour were relevant. The literature on governance shows that there is a gap in the understanding of local issues by policy makers as well as an understanding of urban planning and policy by local residents (Sanjek, 2000; Richard E Stren, 2000; Valladares & Coelho, 1995; Viviescas, 2001; Ward, 1990a). Thus, this research presents a foundation for constructing a framework of planning and policy for public space that incorporates local perspectives in terms of local spatial practices.

Another methodological dimension that was not intended to be part of this research refers to participatory research processes. This research discussed issues related to participation of local communities in the urban planning and policy of Bogotá. However, it did not involve action research as part of the methodological design. Despite the fact that this research was not about action research, it has emerged as an area of interest to conduct future studies. These Participatory research approaches have been employed to some extent in Colombia (Fals Borda, 1999, 2000; Valladares & Coelho, 1995). However, it has rarely been used for research on spatial practice in local parks and other socio-spatial oriented approaches and, for that reason it may be fruitful to develop action research in these types of studies in the future.
8.6 Areas for further research

Expanding on the versatility of local parks in accommodating the needs of a variety of groups, further research could emphasise the spatial practice of each subgroup. These subgroups include age groups, women’s groups, church groups, and others. The reason to do that is to find other qualitative issues that drive each subgroup to use parks in the ways they do. For example, an important theme that has not been widely investigated is the issue of gender within spatial practice in parks. This research did not specifically explore issues of gender but acknowledges that it corresponds to a more detailed area of study that can identify the socio-spatial relationships, or spatial practice of women in parks, neighbourhoods, and their homes. Research on gender issues in Latin America and specifically Colombia tends to focus on the poverty and violence that women often endure (Moser & Clark, 2002; Moser & Mcllwaine, 2000; Peattie, 1987). However, little has been studied in terms of the spatial practices of women in cities, apart from a number of anthropological studies in other cities and regions (Altman & Low, 1992; Setha M. Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003) More in-depth research on gender issues in terms of spatial practice in Latin America could be conducted.

The findings of this research are useful as a guide for understanding the main needs and approaches to local parks by different age groups. However, the spatial practice of each age group, their perceptions of public space and recreational needs could be further developed in other qualitative studies. Further research could not only address the spatial practice of different age groups but the role of other local associations in their neighbourhoods and how they use the local parks in relation to the purpose of the group. For instance, this research acknowledges that there are different types of groups that use the park such as church groups, women’s groups, and parent’s groups. They were not the objects of study for this specific research but they are relevant in the spatial practice of local parks for that reason they can be the focus of further qualitative research.

Further studies could also address and explore how spatial practice occurs in other types of public spaces. Researching the spatial practice of metropolitan parks for instance could represent an important piece of research that could be compared with
this study in order to delineate the qualitative differences between parks of different scales. The researcher assumes that spatial practice of metropolitan and district parks are different from local parks because of the finding that local parks have unique characterisations. Therefore, it could be an interesting theme for further exploration and perhaps comparison. More social research on the characteristics of socio-economic groups and the conditions of the different socio-economic areas is necessary, especially for future administrations to be able to provide services where needed and to try to diminish segregation.

The issue of socio-economic status and segregation can be explored in other areas such as public transport, work environments, for instance. The better the understanding of how people from different socio-economic groups respond to the everyday urban lifestyles the better these issues can be addressed by urban management. For instance the issue of relating public transport and alternative transport means with low socio-economic groups seems to be a misconception that could be stoping further development of better transport systems. This section could extensively list issues for further research on urban public space, urban management, local communities, and spatial practice, among others. This is mainly because Colombia is one of the least researched countries in Latin America. Thus, the research for this thesis is a relevant advancement in urban research in Bogotá and offers perspectives for a large number of areas of future research.

Furthermore it could be of benefit for the future planning and policy making in Bogotá that spatial practices of residents be considered in planning and in the implementation of projects. There are different participatory strategies that could take place. However, a starting point could be that the technocratic initiatives embrace the available research such as this specific study and others examining local action or participation (Fals Borda, 2000; Mejia Pavony & Zambrano, 2000; Montezuma, 2000).
8.7 Conclusion

The ways people use their local parks and the relationships that result from that use constitute spatial practice in local parks. Spatial practice, specifically, refer to the tangible, sensorial, visible elements of socio-spatial relationships. It is part of the spatial triad that Lefebvre formulated in ‘The production of space’. The other two elements of the triad are ‘representational space’ and ‘representations of space’. The former refers to perceptions, memories and symbols that people attach to space and the later refers to the conceptual frameworks about socio-spatial relationships that result from expertise. The research for this thesis has emphasised the way spatial practice occurs and has identified that spatial practice is the hierarchical element of the triad. Spatial practice includes and reflects the other two elements of the triad in the sensorial milieu.

The first research question addressed the reciprocal interactions between park users in each park by examining the implications of their spatial practice. Spatial practice in local parks can be observed through the relationships between users and the space, through the interactions between people in parks, through the development of recreational, leisure and cultural activities and all other actions that support these activities and through the development of a sense of belonging or attachment to the place. The data also reveal that local parks are small universes where different types of groups interact. This research showed how different age groups- children, youth, adults and elders- relate to the park and to other groups. Each age group perceives and uses parks in different ways. Sometimes the different approaches to parks and recreation cause clashes between groups. Other times these different approaches contributes to the development of a variety of interactions that root in the culture of local communities. Either way these interactions and relationships between park users enrich the spatial practice of local parks.

The second research question compared spatial practices of two parks from different socio-economic status. This comparison showed that the different ways users interact in local parks revealed a new way of understanding recreation in local parks in Bogotá. These differences often are a consequence of the different lifestyles communities experience according to their socio-economic status and these lifestyles
in the long-term appear to enrich their local culture. This comparison revealed that local parks are unique spaces because their spatial practice is original to the community that uses each park. Socio-economic status influences the ways communities shape their public space.

The third research question evaluates the impact of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ at the local level. The project ‘Parks for learning how to live’ has been the most important intervention in Bogotá in its recent history. At the metropolitan level it generated a complete new organisation of the structure of the city. It encouraged important transformations in the social fabric such as improving tolerance, conviviality, good use and good behaviours and sense of belonging among citizens. Another important contribution of this project and in general Peñaloza’s administration (1996-2000) was the improvement of urban management and urban governance in the city. However, the impact of the project at the local level appears to be not as strong as it was in the metropolitan level. Despite the weaknesses of ‘Parks for learning how to live’ in the local context, it open opportunities and potentials for participation, community development, conviviality and improvement of quality of life in local communities. These potentials are being explored in recent times with the formulation of new initiatives that resulted from ‘Parks for learning how to live’.

The new challenge for the municipal administration of Bogotá and all stakeholders is to encourage sustainable initiatives that improve the quality of urban life in the long-term. ‘Parks for learning how to live’ formulated the necessary changes for developing public space that contributes to a more liveable and convivial city. The subsequent administrations need to improve and continue developing transformations in which long-term sustainability. Future initiatives need to value active community participation, innovative and creative ways to approach urban problems, and understanding of local communities, their spatial practice, cultural richness and tacit knowledge.
‘-Ella está en el horizonte- dice Fernando Birri-. Me acerro dos pasos, ella se aleja dos pasos. Camino diez pasos y el horizonte se corre diez pasos más allá. Por mucho que yo camine, nunca la alcanzaré.

Para qué sirve la utopía? Para eso sirve: para caminar’.

‘- She is in the horizon - says Fernando Birri -. I approach her two steps she moves away two steps. I walk ten steps and the horizon moves ten steps further on. No matter how much I walk, I will never reach her. What is utopia for? For that it serves: for walking’.

(De las palabras andantes)
Uselo y tirelo
Eduardo Galeano
1994
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### Niza Park

#### 2002

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<td>18/01</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
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P.H: public holiday

Security: only the security guard present in the park

Weather presented in degrees Celsius
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>27/07</td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>16 sunny</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>27/07</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>16 sunny</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>27/07</td>
<td>Night</td>
<td>12 cold</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>28/07</td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>12 bit of rain</td>
<td>40 +150 M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>28/07</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>15 sunny</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>People</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>26/01</td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>25 sunny</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>12/01</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>16 cloudy</td>
<td>170 P.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>20/01</td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>12 sunny</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>13/01</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>15 cloudy</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>27/01</td>
<td>Night</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>11/02</td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>25 sunny</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>4/02</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>28 sunny</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>15/01</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>25 sunny</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>5/02</td>
<td>Night</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>9/01</td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>15 cloudy</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>16/01</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>20 sunny</td>
<td>136</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10/01</td>
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<td>20 sunny</td>
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<td>Saturday</td>
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<td>Sunday</td>
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<td>25 sunny</td>
<td>230 ST</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>18/01</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>15 cloudy</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P.H: public holiday
S: 26 left the place to go to school
M: 150 people in the Sunday grocery market
ST: soccer tournament
Weather is in degrees Celsius
Esta entrevista tomará entre 12 y 15 minutos y busca información sobre el uso del parque por parte de los habitantes del sector. Su interés es completamente académico. Gracias por su colaboración.

Por favor describase:

a. Género: Masculino   Femenino
b. Edad: 12-19  20-35  36-64  64 o más

Es usted habitante o visitante de este barrio?

Habitante
Visitante

Cuánto tiempo se demoró para venir al parque?

Con qué frecuencia viene usted a este parque?

Cuánto tiempo pasa usted en el parque normalmente?

Qué días y a qué horas prefiere usted venir?

Qué actividades desarrolla usted en este parque? Puede listarlas?

Qué actividades no puede desarrollar en el parque?
Con quien acostumbra usted venir?

Ha conocido personas en este parque?

Ha establecido amistad con personas que vienen al parque?

Acostumbra usted reunirse con amigos, conocidos o grupos en el parque? Podría explicar quiénes?

Sabe usted si existen grupos que se reúnan en el parque para desarrollar cualquier tipo de actividad? Pertenece usted a alguno de ellos?

Usted cree que el parque satisface sus necesidades y/o llena sus expectativas? (Cómo o porqué)
En su opinión, A quien le pertenece el parque?

Quien cree que lo mantiene?

Siente usted algún sentido de pertenencia por este parque?

Cuida usted este parque? Como?

Existen actividades comunales y de barrio en este parque? Cuales?

Ha participado usted en ellas?
Sabe de la existencia del proyecto de parques de la alcaldía de Bogotá?

Ha notado algún cambio físico en este parque desde que lo conoce?

Recuerda usted como era el parque hace 3 o 4 años?

Como quiere que sea este parque en el futuro?

Que le agregaría o que le quitaría?

Gracias por su atención
Estoy haciendo una entrevista para saber qué piensan los usuarios sobre este parque y por qué vienen. Las entrevista tomará 20 minutos muchas gracias por su participación.

**Uso**

1. Es usted habitante o visitante de este barrio? [ ] habitante [ ] visitante
2. Cuánto tiempo le toma venir desde su casa a este parque y qué medio de transporte usa?
   - [ ] 5 min o menos
   - [ ] 10 min
   - [ ] 20 min
   - [ ] 30 min
   - [ ] 40 min o más
   - [ ] a pie
   - [ ] bicicleta
   - [ ] transporte público
   - [ ] carro (transp. Privado)
3. Con qué frecuencia viene usted al parque?
   - [ ] todos los días
   - [ ] 3 a 5 vez/sem
   - [ ] 1 o 2 vez/sem
   - [ ] menos de 1 vez/sem

4. Cuánto tiempo permanece en el parque cuando viene?

5. Que días prefiere venir? Y a qué hora(s)?

6. Que actividades desarrolla usted en el parque?
   - [ ] observar, descansar (solo)
   - [ ] charlar, encontrarse con gente
   - [ ] futbol, basket, voleiball
   - [ ] otros deportes
   - [ ] juegos infantiles
   - [ ] ver juegos o deportes
   - [ ] educativo
   - [ ] comercio
   - [ ] cuidar niños
   - [ ] trabajar
   - [ ] Pasear mascotas
   - [ ] otras cuales? _______________________________________________

**Relaciones con otros, Interacción, Convivencia**

7. Con quien o quienes acostumbra usted venir al parque?

8. Usa el parque como punto de encuentro? Con quien(es)?

9. Ha conocido gente en el parque? Se ha hecho amigo de algunos de ellos?

10. Sabe si existen normas de comportamiento en este parque? Cuáles? Sigue usted esas normas?

11. Usted ha visto o ha tenido un enfrentamiento con otra gente en este parque? Como fue la situación?

12. Que cree que deben hacer los demás para convivir en armonía en el parque? Que cree que usted debe hacer?

**Participación de la comunidad**

13. Sabe usted si existen grupos que se reúnen en el parque para desarrollar actividades deportivas, sociales o culturales? Podría dar ejemplos?
14. Ha habido actidades comunitarias o del barrio en este parque? Cuales? Ha participado?

15. Que tipo de agrupaciones o actividades le gustaria que hubiera para que usted participara?

Administracion del parque

16. En su opinion a quien le pertenece el parque?

17. Quien lo mantiene y como? Que entidad maneja los parques? Es publica o privada?

18. Sabe usted sobre el proyecto de parques que desarrollo la alcaldia de Penaloza?

19. Sabe usted de otros proyectos en los parques desarrollados posteriormente? Cuales? Ha participado?

20. Que piensa usted del desempeno de la alcaldia y de la entidad que maneja los parques?

21. Que piensa usted del desempeno de los representantes de accion comunal de este barrio?

Sentido de pertenencia por el lugar (Place attachment)

22. Este parque satisface sus necesidades o llena sus expectativas? Por que?

23. Cuanto tiempo lleva viendo a este parque?

24. Tiene usted recuerdos de experiencias vividas en este parque? Como fue su primera visita, que recuerda de esa experiencia?

25. Como se siente cuando viene y permanece algun rato en este parque?

   ● ● ● ● ●
   muy mal mal neutral bien muy bien

Por que? ________________________________________________________________
26. En pocas palabras, que significa este parque para usted y para su estilo de vida?

27. Tiene usted sentido de pertenencia por este parque?
   - poco
   - regular
   - mucho

Por que?

28. Habla usted con otras personas sobre este parque? Que les dice?

29. Cuida usted de este parque? Como?

Vision del parque en el futuro

30. Ha notado cambios en este parque? Cuales? Cuando sucedieron?

31. Recuerda como era el parque hace 3 o 4 anos?

32. Que le agregaria o le quitaria al parque?

33. Que le gustaria que sucediera en este parque que no sucede en este momento?

Informacion Personal

34. Sexo: □ Femenino □ Masculino
35. Edad: □ 12-19 □ 20-35 □ 36-64 □ 64 o mas
36. Ocupacion: ________________________________
Human Research

Memo To : Dr Gregory Teal (p/s), Olga Duarte (p/r).

From : Sharon Falleiro

Date : 31.7.02


I am pleased to inform you that the Human Research Ethics Panel has granted full ethics approval for your project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Commencement Date</td>
<td>31.7.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval valid to</td>
<td>30.7.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel Approval No</td>
<td>HREP 02:113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Panel normally grants Approvals for a maximum twelve-month period. A final report should be submitted on completion of the project if this occurs within twelve months. If the research project is to continue beyond the twelve months, the principal researcher is required to submit a progress report and seek an extension.

The Principal investigator is required to report immediately anything that may affect the ethical acceptance of the project to the Panel, including any proposed modifications to the project, adverse effects on participants, unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. Should you encounter any ethical issues or dilemmas, you are encouraged to contact the Panel for advice.

*The above approval number must be quoted in all future correspondence regarding this project.*

Kind Regards,

Sharon Falleiro
Human Ethics Officer, HREP
Phone : (02) 97726785
Email : s.falleiro@uws.edu.au
10 November 2003

Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte
25/341 Bulwara Road
Ultimo NSW 2007

Dear Olga

Res Research Project: Urban Governance, management and space: Parks, Planning and neighbourhoods in Bogota Registration Number HEC 03/159

The Committee has reviewed your responses to the issues raised and has agreed to grant your project an approval.

You are advised that the Committee should be notified of any further change/s to the research methodology should there be any in the future. You will be required to provide a report on the ethical aspects of your project at the completion of this project as well as interim reports upon request. The form is attached and also located on the Research Services Web Page.

The Protocol No. HEC 03/159 should be quoted in all future correspondence about this project. Your approval will expire 30 December 2005. Please contact the Human Ethics Officer, Kay Buckley on tel: 4570 1136 if you require any further information.

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Chairperson
UWS Human Research Ethics Committee
Cc Dr Gregory Teale
To whom it may concern,

I am conducting a case study of two urban parks in two neighbourhoods of Bogota-Colombia. These parks belong to the project of “Parks for learning how to live” promoted by the City Council since 1998. I am interested in evaluating impacts of this project on communities, especially taking into account the interactions between government and management of parks, urban landscape and design of parks and peoples’ uses and perceptions of parks.

This study is part of the research leading to a Master of Commerce (Honours) Degree under the supervision of Doctor Gregory Teal and Doctor Fernanda Duarte of the School of Management at the University of Western Sydney.

I request permission to access a sample of experts and community representatives, who form part of different metropolitan and local organisations related to the parks in Bogota. These representatives would be interviewed about the parks and their role in the City Council’s project and their involvement with the parks.

The participation of these representatives is entirely voluntary and their anonymity is protected by any identifying information not appearing on any raw data or written report. Data will be kept in secure storage at the University of Western Sydney for 5 years after the study is completed. After this period it will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions, or require clarification of any aspect regarding involvement in the study, please contact me by phone on (1) 4 107353 in Bogota-Colombia and (02) 4620 3767 in Sydney-Australia or e-mail olucamacho@hotmail.com. Alternatively, you may contact my Principal Supervisor,
Doctor Gregory Teal on 61 2 4620 3247 in Sydney Australia or greg.teal@uws.edu.au.

Thank you in anticipation,

Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 61 2 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

NOTE: To be printed on UWS letterhead following Ethics approval.
Dear Interviewee

I am conducting a case study of two urban parks in two neighbourhoods of Bogota-Colombia. These parks belong to the project of “Parks for learning how to live” promoted by the City Council since 1998. I am interested in evaluating impacts of this project on communities, especially taking into account the interactions between government and management of parks, urban landscape and design of parks and peoples’ uses and perceptions of parks.

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Señores Junta de Acción Comunal:

Estoy desarrollando un estudio de caso sobre parques de barrio en Bogotá como requerimiento de mi Maestría en Comercio en la Universidad del Occidente de Sydney (University of Western Sydney) en Australia. En esta tesis tengo como Supervisor Principal al Doctor Gregory Teal y como Supervisor Asociada a la Doctora Fernanda Duarte.

El interés de la tesis que estoy desarrollando consiste en analizar y evaluar los parques así como las dinámicas sociales que los afectan. Para este efecto, me permito solicitarles su permiso para realizar un trabajo de campo que incluye observación y algunas entrevistas en el parque. De este trabajo depende la continuación y éxito de este estudio. Es importante aclarar que el interés de este trabajo es netamente académico y no afectará negativamente al barrio, al parque o a sus residentes.

La participación de cualquier persona es completamente voluntaria y su identidad será protegida, ninguna información personal o que lo identifique aparecerá en ningún reporte o material frutos de este trabajo. Cualquier tipo de información provista será almacenada en un archivo de seguridad de la universidad y después de un periodo de cinco años, esta será destruida.

Si tiene cualquier tipo de pregunta o requiere aclaración o mayor explicación sobre este estudio, puede comunicarse conmigo al teléfono 4107353 en Bogotá o vía e-mail a alaugamacho@hotmail.com. Adicionalmente puede contactar a mi Supervisor Principal Doctor Gregory Teal al teléfono 61 2 4620 3247 en Sydney Australia o vía e-mail a greg.teal@uws.edu.au.
Atentamente,

Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte
Estudiante de Maestria
UWS

Revisado: Dr. Gregory Teal
A quien le interese:

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Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte
Estudiante de Maestría
UWS

Revisado: Dr. Gregory Teal
December, 2003

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greg.teal@uws.edu.au. In Colombia you may contact the Architect Liliana Guzman, Supervisor of regulations in the Institute of Sports and Recreation, Subdivision of Constructions on 6605400 ext. 4011, 4012, 4013.

Thank you in anticipation,

Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte

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To Local Council

I am conducting a case study of two urban parks in two neighbourhoods of Bogota-Colombia. These parks belong to the project of “Parks for learning how to live” promoted by the City Council since 1998. I am interested in evaluating impacts of this project on communities, especially taking into account the interactions between government and management of parks, urban landscape and design of parks and peoples’ uses and perceptions of parks.

This study is part of research leading to a PhD degree at the School of Management under the supervision of Doctor Gregory Teal and Doctor Fernanda Duarte of the School of Management at the University of Western Sydney.

I request permission to study the park by conducting the research methods of observation, mapping and interviews. These methods seek information about use, evaluation and perception of parks as well as sense of community and sense of ownership from the neighbours. Your cooperation will be needed to this stage in order for the study results to take on meaning.

Community’s participation is entirely voluntary and anonymity is protected by any identifying information not appearing on any raw data or written report. Data will be kept in secure storage at the University of Western Sydney for 5 years after the study is completed. After this period it will be destroyed.

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Atentamente,

Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte
Estudiante de Doctorado
UWS
Revisado: Dr. Gregory Teal
Señores Junta de Acción Comunal:

Estoy desarrollando un estudio de caso sobre parques de barrio en Bogotá como requerimiento de mi Doctorado en la Facultad de Administracion de la Universidad del Occidente de Sydney (University of Western Sydney) en Australia. En esta tesis tengo como Supervisor Principal al Doctor Gregory Teal y como Supervisora Asociada a la Doctora Fernanda Duarte.

El interés de la tesis que estoy desarrollando consiste en analizar y evaluar los parques así como las dinámicas sociales que los afectan. Para este efecto, me permito solicitarles su permiso para realizar un trabajo de campo que incluye observación y algunas entrevistas en el parque. De este trabajo depende la continuación y éxito de este estudio. Es importante aclarar que el interés de este trabajo es netamente académico y no afectará negativamente al barrio, al parque o a sus residentes.

La participación de cualquier persona es completamente voluntaria y su identidad será protegida, ninguna información personal o que lo identifique aparecerá en ningún reporte o material frutos de este trabajo. Cualquier tipo de información provista será almacenada en un archivo de seguridad de la universidad y después de un periodo de cinco años, esta será destruida.
Si tiene cualquier tipo de pregunta o requiere aclaración o mayor explicación sobre este estudio, puede comunicarse conmigo al teléfono 4107353 en Bogotá o vía e-mail a olucamacho@hotmail.com. Adicionalmente puede contactar a mi Supervisor Principal Doctor Gregory Teal al teléfono 61 2 4620 3247 en Sydney Australia o vía e-mail a greg.teal@uws.edu.au.

Atentamente,

Olga Lucia Camacho Duarte
Estudiante de Doctorado
UWS

Revisado: Dr. Gregory Teal
Consentimiento para participar en un proyecto de investigación

Usted ha sido invitado para participar en una investigación sobre la interacción entre parques vecinales y las comunidades que los usan en Bogotá. El objeto de este estudio es analizar el uso de los parques, la vinculación de la comunidad y el sentido de pertenencia. Este estudio está siendo conducido por Olga Camacho perteneciente a la Escuela de Administración de la Universidad del Occidente de Sydney como parte de sus estudios doctorales. Su director de tesis es Dr. Gregory Teal quien puede ser contactado en greg.teal@uws.edu.au.

Si usted acepta participar en este estudio, se le pedirá que tome parte en una entrevista que tratará temas sobre el uso de los parques, cambios físicos en ellos, diseño, administración y vinculación de la comunidad y sentido de pertenencia.

La participación en este estudio tomará 15 minutos para entrevistas callejeras o de 30 a 60 minutos para entrevistas detalladas.

No se conocen riesgos asociados con su participación en estas entrevistas aparte de los riesgos de la vida diaria.

La investigadora le ha explicado el estudio y ha contestado sus preguntas. Si tiene alguna pregunta adicional o desea reportar algún problema relacionado con la investigación, usted puede contactar a la investigadora olcamacho@uws.edu.au. Si desea más información sobre sus derechos como participante de esta investigación, puede contactar al Comité de Ética de la Universidad k.buckley@uws.edu.au.

Su aporte a esta investigación es voluntario, usted puede negarse a participar o retirarse en cualquier momento sin acarrear ninguna consecuencia.

Su privacidad será asegurada a través de la no publicación de sus datos personales en ningún reporte escrito.

Las entrevistas serán grabadas en audio, si usted desea puede revisar los cassettes y pedir que algunas partes sean borradas.

Consentimiento

[Signature]

Santos Rodríguez

Fecha: 9-24-04

Participante
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Consentimiento

[Signature]

Participante: **[Signature]**

Fecha: **[Signature]**
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Consentimiento

[Signature]
Participante

Fecha 13-2-04
Consentimiento para participar en un proyecto de investigación

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Consentimiento

[Signature]
Participante

12-2-04
Fecha