A Hidden Treasure in the Urban Structure of Maracaibo

Introduction.

> …the city large or small, rich or poor, dynamic or static, it is recognized in the fact that it has a spirit, in that it completes an idea and that such idea and spirit anonymously connect everything that takes place in the city, from the way stones are orpdered to the tone used by men of the city to talk… (J. E: Rodó, in Chiancone: 1984).

The globalization of the urbanization process in Latin America and the Caribbean countries during the last fifteen years - with 75% of the population living in the cities – has stimulated the generation of urban conglomerates which are at the same time, subject and product of this phenomenon. Most of these cities have gone through a violent urbanization process with a total absence of harmony in its development, harming its potential to build a sustainable city and citizenship.

Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires and Mexico City are among the largest cities in the world, giving rise to complex sceneries in which the social, economic and political context causes rough inequalities. In spite of its smaller sizes, Venezuelan cities are not exempt from this condition and are characterized for the uncertainty of its habitat - over 60% of the urban extension is object of illegal possession - which causes deep irregularities in its territorial distribution and standard of life as well as a pronounced deficiency of citizenship.

Maracaibo, is the second one in the system of Venezuelan cities and the main center of oil exploitation; like the main cities of the competitive Latin American market, Maracaibo has had to fight against the challenge imposed by the tendency to fragmentation due to urban growth which harms a large number of cities in the contemporary world, in its transition from a cohesive city due to the application of a Regulating Planning which dates from the 60's toward an extended city of a metropolitan character.

In addition, the economic climate of the early XXI century related to the increase in the oil prices has strengthened the socioeconomic inequalities, benefiting mainly the upper social classes. On the other hand, the limited urban control on part of the municipal authorities of Maracaibo has eased commercial operations to the real estate and construction sectors, supporting investment strategies proposed to build housing units to fulfill the growing demand of the residential market.

The permissiveness of the local government, in ceding its responsibilities of the city's development and growth to individuals and in the provision of a sustainable and appropriate habitat, has increased investment opportunities in the underrated suburb lots, which has segmented the compact city of the middle of the XX century. In this way, the privatization of public territory in the urban periphery has quickly grown during the last 15 years, increasing investment opportunities.

However, the operation has contributed to ensure the availability of public utilities in large areas strategically located as it has incorporated these areas, normally neglected, to the short term real estate market even though the service supply does not guarantee the sustainability of this business in the long term.

The productive capacity of the informal sector.

According to Oteiza (1996), in Venezuela, the incompetence of the construction field, whether public or private, to offer a housing solution to the lower income population causes great inequities in the cities, that may be seen in the extensive shanty towns that occupy the urban periphery; where the agile self-management dynamics of these population groups is showed; especially, in the main oil production centers. Therefore; Maracaibo, Cabimas, Lagunillas, Bachaquero and Ciudad Ojeda, demonstrate growth in the informal city that overcomes the formal sector's ability to "make city", generating *another city* which is more extensive than the formal city itself.

Historically, Venezuela has been recognized for its multiethnic and multicultural acceptance, and its mestizo call. Spatially, even though cities present different areas socially and economically, they have not been exempt from the integration neighborhood areas with other urban areas.

Thus, in Maracaibo, the boundaries between what could be named the "formal" city; with residential uses for high and middle income, commercial and financial uses; and the periphery's "informal" city, occupied by spontaneous low income neighborhoods for lower income groups; have been intermingling with each other to the point where such low income neighborhoods are harbored within the formal area and consolidated neighborhoods in the city's perimeter. However, the communities have kept their social and spatial singularities, and their future depends on the importance that is given to the local against the influence of the global dynamics.

In this respect, it must be pointed out that the Santa Lucia neighborhood presents itself as a local community that has maintained characteristic social, cultural and spatial values over time; in benefit of the particular patrimonial interest, and the affection and importance given to the neighborhood by the city's inhabitants.

This work project reveals the first advances of the research: *Maracaibo, New urban centralities*, that aims among its objectives to analyze different strategies that make the consolidation of multifunctional centers viable, which will perform as development hubs on the path to urban sustainability.

We have intended to offer a multidisciplinary vision of Santa Lucia's inhabitants' lifestyle through our researchers' perspective, trying to go beyond the stereotypes that have characterized their image, and to investigate on how the concept of "place" has been built, on their modes of organization and participation, on their habits and use of spare time, on the collective creativity, and its fundamental conflicts and tensions.

The city as cultural construction.

Cities are culturally complex constructions, are the product of socially residing and living, with its own life and constitute the urban drama which, as organisms, is able to solve: to be born, grow, develop themselves and generate its own deficiencies and needs. Meeting its needs represents the greatest challenge.

Geographic and developmental conditions of Maracaibo suggest specific strategies and actions. The way in which the plain of Maracaibo was populated, historically determined the preeminence of the city in its own environment and the absence of other urban nuclei in its proximity. After developed, these urban nuclei were mingled due to the process of metropolis and urban growth, but it is easy to think that said nuclei acted as structuring elements of the city of our times.

Our action as researchers must then, be oriented to these processes in order to create solutions from resources and conditions specific of every environment which lead us to a new concept of a city, to look for a solution to the problems of our city, to a particular idea of integration and sustainability.

Topophilia condition as a resource for development.

Within the same context but from another standpoint, it must be pointed out that Yory (2007) emphasizes the importance of the intense relationship that must exist between the location and its inhabitants and relates it to the term topophilia which for Gaston Bachelard "is a poetic category of spirit from which the perception of space is conceived not only for the sensitive experience that may be had of space but also for the heavy imaginative load through which it might be asserted that `acquires value´, which is to say, in `appropriate´ prominence (2007: 371)". Yori also mentions Yi Fu Tuan for whom topophilia "is a feeling of

attachment or an emotive-affective relationship which ties human beings to those places in which, for one reason or another, they feel easy and identified with (Ibid: 374).

Yori values these definitions because he bases his opinion in the idea of topos promoted by Aristotle (a type of relationship, a way to be with) and in the concept of ethos (ethics, ethology, ways to socially and spatially behave and the interrelationship of construct-to live in sustained by Heiddeger when Yori claims that: "topophilia is the act of originating co-appropriation between the human being and the world through which the world becomes world in the opening that the human being makes from said world in his historic-spacing nature and the human being becomes human in his spatiallizing" (Ibid: 385).

In developing some of his urban projects, Yori puts into practice this topophilic concept of mutual appropriation between the man and "his place" and, additionally, integrates important concepts that must be considered to illustrate said appropriation: the identification and integration of the man with the place, the physical compensation that the place provides to his needs, the political satisfaction and other aspects, while he capitalizes on the potential of the appropriation that such place provides to construct the future.

Therefore, there is the idea of conciliating actions oriented to place the city in a pertinent and opportune position of competitiveness that many Latin American cities have achieved, through efforts aimed to take advantage of and optimize the potential provided by its original patrimonial condition. That is to say, to promote the relationships that gives meaning to its sense of transcendence in the patrimonial and cultural aspects of said cities.

Taking into account these realities, this work project is oriented to the analysis of the Santa Lucia neighborhood as an expression of local values and as an expression of the cohabitation of the local aspect within the global aspect, in the search of a Sustainable Development Proposal (DUS) of the socio-spatial values of the neighborhood in the context of the city marketing, of a city immersed in the circumstances of the era of globalization and information; for said search, measures must be taken on part of the three factors involved: the community, the public sector and the private sector.

Maracaibo, XXth Century.

Maracaibo, like other cities in the world, was a victim of the modern urban theory that imposed a vision of architecture and the city, tied to great scale unitary interventions of urban renewal. The new paradigms of international urban intervention consider a broader spectrum of possibilities; which are able to serve both, macro levels of intervention to more precise and limited plans and projects, that value individual and collective interests that are more determined and concrete.

A scan of the city's historical downtown from the pier to almost University avenue, demonstrated in the first development of the city, certain continuity in the foundational grid despite of eventual density variations. The management of modern urbanism criteria and the availability of vacant lands on the plain determined the adoption of a development outline based on the construction of great road systems, needed to connect suburban developments that have prolonged the city's extension.

This has caused a little dense structure, of informal character, that lessens effectiveness to urban services, stimulates the heterogeneity of the weaving, and prevents the reading of the city in the respect of new ways to perceive it, inhabit it and conceive it.

The periphery, as a morphological structure is a modern phenomenon, normally growing out of proportions; without being able to be perceived as a foreseen and planned extension of the central structures. Maracaibo is an eloquent example of this affirmation.

The center is urban (with all that the urban term implies); the periphery is the suburb, is suburban. This suburban condition may be understood as the part of the city that, within a

natural growth process, must end reaching such density and complexity that allows it to share and assume its own conditions of centrality.

Monocentrality and Polycentrality. Case Study: Maracaibo.

The idea of a polycentric development model of the city leads to the value of the new possible activities centers. This model intends to rediscover inert calls in places, commercial areas, non-exploited landscaping reservation areas; spaces that offer multiple possibilities for a more plural city, capable of identifying itself with places with peculiarities defining their cultural, civic, commercial, recreational character; among others.

Polycentrality begins to present itself as the ideal for the metropolis allowing its inhabitants to benefit from the advantages that urbanity offers without having to use a centrality far from their neighborhood. The proposal in the form of small districts enables the alternative of the polycentric city as opposed to the monocentric city; which is able to make feasible a true identification with the territory, and make it an attractive option.

This situation obtains multiple shades in accordance with the city under study, and Maracaibo offers a very particular example: a city with a great extension and few centers of metropolitan use. The centers are basically conformed by the historical downtown and the centralities associated to the first avenues that consolidated the city: 5 de Julio and Bella Vista. The rest of the city is conformed by a periphery out of proportion and relatively amorphous that expresses the spatial and demographic extension of the city.

Then, it is worth asking what identifies Maracaibo as an urban phenomenon? Or better yet, through which elements do its inhabitants identify themselves with the city?

In Maracaibo, the identification with the city is done through its private and individual elements: home, work, friends, commerce; but in what moment is the Marabinian aware of the city's urban spaces, those spaces and places that identify her and differentiate her collectively from other cities in Venezuela? Where is our urban architecture, our public spaces?

Lake Maracaibo, Vereda del Lago Park, old Paseo Ciencias, La Marina Park, La Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Chiquinquirá Plaza, Baralt Square; as a political-administrative- religious center of the Marabinian essentiality; authentic articulator of the urban structure, which defined its gravitational center and greatly contributed to promote the "awareness" of the existence of public space. These are the values which make Maracaibo one of the most beautiful and original urban centers in our country; however, these places are inadverted by owners and strangers.

For its metropolitan uses, its relative location within the city, its intrinsic peculiarities and potentials, places that identified within the urban collective stand out from the urban spot; for example: the urban doors close to the Bridge over the lake (south) the northern entrance of the city, the University rental areas, Santa Lucia, the population of San Francisco in San Francisco county; although the majority of these cases are embryonic situations in a territory where the transforming potential has not been developed.

Santa Lucia, a unique urban piece

Santa Lucia, also known as El Empedrao neighborhood, is presented as the last trace of the XIX Century city, product of the demolitions that were carried out in the foundational city – during the 1970 decade-, when her first growth may be taken into consideration. Authentic expression of the XIX century architecture and beginning of XX; when it was built on the coastal plain nearby the historical downtown (Fig. 1).

Its creation as a parish begins in 1844 (Sempere: 2000), when the extension of the original city-port is broaden beyond la Cañada Nueva, which, at the moment, was the northern city limit. This natural boundary prevented the expansion of the city, and with it, the weaving in the foundation's grid, to promote the development of the outside population, with a clear

definition in its urban structure. From that moment on, it was identified as a fishermen's village, extended in an interrupted manner up to the Punta del Empedrao in the space between the coast and the Camino Real del Milagro; as a gradual integration process in the urban structure which is consolidated with the layout of the trolley car lines in 1886. (Fig.2)

The geographic variations in the area where it settled generated micro regions that determined the way that the sector grew. Santa Lucia occupied a coast plain with variable width that, in time, harbored a village called Nueva Venecia, developed on the sides of the street to the point where it was differentiated of Camino Real, which extended until la Punta del Empedrao, north of where there were hills with heights between 10 and 20 mts.

Towards the West, the land rises up small hills to reach Camino Real de Bella Vista. The village was structured in the interior then, starting from lines in West-East direction that intended to relate both roads –El Milagro and Bella Vista- and more interrupted lines in North-South direction that related with the historical city. The structure of the sector was consolidated starting from an irregular sequence of small streets that rise from the coast, where the topography presents open spaces which physical and spatial homogeneity gives the neighborhood characteristics that differentiate it from its context. (Fig.3)

The natural context, characterized by the inclination, integrates two interesting physical-geographical facts, an elevated focal point and an almost plain sector, less elevated, which goes from this one to the Avenida El Milagro, which real boundary is defined by the lake shore. These landscape values are unified and magnified by a particular architecture that integrates neoclassic and Antillean to its colonial origin essence, and that was consolidated towards the end of the XIX century and beginning of the XX; showing a blend of strong colors with roof with two or four slopes, gargoyles and rose-windows, tall doors and windows, and balustrades that provide Maracaibo with a particular identity within the Venezuelan cities system. (Fig.4)

The environmental quality, combined with the historic values, have conditioned the particular segregation of Santa Lucia from the rest of the city, protecting it from the agile developing dynamics influenced by the appearance of oil, allowing the preservation of historic and social icons: important physical spatial values, customs, traditions, interpersonal relations dynamics, and other genuine surroundings of tangible patrimonial and historic value, that have made it deserving of the city's respect. Furthermore, it has provided real everyday life coexistence spaces, emphasizing the small hill that is occupied by the square and the church.

Santa Lucia in the context of the City of Maracaibo.

According to Marcano, the public space is the collective part of the urban space and main site:

> where "the city is lived". It is the territory where they overlap with the individual, the public and the private, the economic and social and cultural and administrative. It is defined… as the material and concrete entity where the collective unfolds, meaning, life and urban activity. Its value resides in its ability to organize the public activities of the city, the way in which according to its morphology its use can be regulated, its aesthetic quality and how its access and enjoyment are controlled (1999:64).

Santa Lucia's urban context, as part of Maracaibo's foundational downtown, is characterized by the coexistence of different building weavings, thanks to the permanence of some original functions: formal and informal commerce, port activities, city and state government and administrative functions.

The historical downtown is a product of a spatial temporality that caused a certain discontinuity between the traditional city –whether republican or colonial- and the modern city, indirect result of economic diversity provided by oil, and in consequence, by the form and dimensions of urban development and growth.

Traditionally, it has been the center of social life and exchange relationships, the public space by excellence where the urban development control problems converge, problems of the land's price, problems related to historical patrimony use and access control in the social aspect, since it is the scenario where the different layers of the city come together, each one with its own behavioral patterns, traditions, desires and needs.

Santa Lucia constitutes the transition between the foundational area of the city and its expansion, expressed by the discontinuities of the urban grid, the grain and the building weaving and, therefore, of the scale, of the quality of the construction and consolidation of the buildings; of land use: from the commercial, administrative and institutional to the residential; from formal to informal. (Fig. Nº 5)

Santa Lucia, calling of transcendence and multicultural heritage.

The old Santa Lucia chapel established the first symptom of outside settlement consolidation, and the devotion to the Patron Saint grew as a cohesion and identity factor, since its name was part of its community's filiation and its collective memory. The life and memory of the neighborhood have been historically associated to the square. Its formal and identity values, integrated as parameters to be considered in all its enormous cultural transcendence, have justified its conservation as an architectonic monument with all its importance and non transferable dimension, but organically integrated to the social and economic reality, as a result of a process that has not evolved in time. (Fig. Nº 6)

Because of its privileged location, the square assumed the function of structuring the public space, which was ratified by the construction of the church –in 1867- at the same place, by request of the inhabitants that resided the lakeshore area; since it satisfied the sense of belonging relationship among all neighbors equally as visuals converged from any point of the neighborhood (Chiancone: 1984). Inversely, from the square the visual relation with the lake, makes it part of the villagers feeling. (Fig. Nº 6)

In 1970, Santa Lucia is declared heritage site of the region; and, in 1990, The Institute of Cultural Patrimony proclaims it artistic, historic and cultural patrimony of Maracaibo; and in 1994, as the Nation's historic, architectonic, artistic and cultural patrimony. This declaration provides a legal regulation that protects and orders the preservation of its values, culture, architecture, traditions and customs. (Fig. Nº 8)

From the social point of view, Santa Lucia's community maintains an intense urban life that intends to preserve the values that have characterized it's interpersonal communication and traditional family values, as well as those of its architecture and particular urbanism, in the light of the globalization era. Some of the incipient actions will be pointed out, which began to emerge as artistic, cultural and social initiatives of the community that give the neighborhood the potential to be able to be developed with a centrality character. Its strong cultural and patrimonial qualities guarantee the achievement of this objective.

The Soiree of Santa Lucía.

Since March of 2001, Local artist Clemencia Labin promotes an urban action, initially self managed, that congregates contemporary artists in a route that showcases music, performances, photography, graphic arts, audiovisual projections, theater actors, painters, craftsmen and other artists; together with the members of the hosting community, for the enjoyment of a collective artistic experience.

This dynamic, unique in its genre in the city of Maracaibo, integrates national and international participants in a celebration where the spontaneous, the creativity and the "human warmth" of the local residents stand out, and where the diverse crowd that assists to the event participate in a very particular interactive dialogue.

Clemencia Labin points out as background the event AVE PURISIMA that took place under the framework of the Bienal de Guayana, in Venezuela, and a similar one, also promoted by

her in Hamburg, Germany, where she has resided for more than 30 years now.The Soirees of Santa Lucia started when she wanted to celebrate the inauguration of her own house, bought and restored in the neighborhood , with the intention of satisfying her needs of rootedness, crystallizing an old dream of returning to her origins. This way, she starts a project that develops almost spontaneously, with very little planning, having as main incentive the open and constant dialog with the community where it's born.

…my intention from the very beginning has been to put in evidence that art is something we live, something that is in life itself, in the moment that we are, but that we have to learn to see. We have to learn to visualize it, learn how to be sensitive to the matters of art, and I thought that this way, opening the doors, making a sort of museum in the street, because generally people don't go to the museum… the art is something we live daily, that can be incorporated to every type of opportunity. (Vera: 2007)

During March for a whole week, the 2D street of the neighborhood, which houses, the plaza, and the church, welcomes artistic proposals of every genre, this includes local gastronomy, indigenous crafts, and above all the open dialog with its inhabitants. To achieve that, the daily life spaces are used as exhibit spaces in the search for the neighborly exchange and new ways of exposing art: a street museum that involves the locals in first instance and something that has become an emblematic element in their cultural imaginary.

The House of Cultural Diversity.

The Venezuelan state, recognizing our multiethnic and multicultural condition, has embraced the principles of the Universal Declaration of the UNESCO about Cultural Diversity (2001) and puts it to practice through the creation of Centers of Cultural Diversity at a national level. Cultural Diversity refers to the multiplicity of ways in which the cultures of groups and societies are expressed and transmitted.

The institutions work as centers for the popular and traditional manifestations of each region and they are oriented to protect, enrich, and spread the multiple expressions of cultures that integrate our own nationality and other ingrained cultures; through the development of investigation, formation, diffusion, processes, as well as promotion and support to the construction and strengthening of networks of cultural diversity; sustained in values of respect, equality, participation and fairness between the cultures that serves.

The House of Cultural Diversity of Zulia, very recently created, is based in the neighborhood of Santa Lucia and it emphasizes in its objectives: To consolidate and project our identity through the study, the preservation and spreading of popular and traditional culture of Venezuela; as well as other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is oriented to generate spaces for cultural interchange in a national and international level; the development and promotion of investigations, studies and formation of the local human talent in the subject of traditional cultures and their relation with cultural rights, ethnic recognition, sustainable development and poverty, among others. Through a process of participative diagnostic, it has defined as action areas:

- The investigation, promotion and recognition of the "décima zuliana" as an expression of cultural diversity and linguistic in the State.
- The recognition of the afro-descending matrix in the state
- The motion for the cultural diversity as a proposal to integrate a voluntary community with people of different backgrounds and experiences, interested and committed to promote the subject in multiple social and geographical spaces of the state.

These areas are implemented through the realization of video-conferences, workshops, discussions, reflective chats, encounters, knowledge exchange, etc.

Communal Councils

Communal councils materialize as the instances of participation, articulation and integration of the diverse communitarian organizations, through which the citizens formulate, execute, control and evaluate the public policies, and formulate projects oriented to answer the necessities and aspirations of the communities[1].

The Communal councils are formed through neighbor associations of the community, through the direct election of its members and speakers of the executive organ, the units of financial management and social administration, and they count among their functions:

- To articulate the social organizations currently present in the community and promote the creation of new ones when necessary.
- To analyze and manage the human and material resources of the community.
- To elaborate a unique work plan to address problems that the community may solve with their own resources and evaluate their results.
- To request the support of members of the community to solve existing problems.
- Other functions established in the Law of Communal Councils.

Currently there are two formally established communal councils in the parish, located strategically in the territory of Santa Lucía and they count with the advisory of the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences of the University of Zulia.

The topophiliac values of the neighborhood and the community of Santa Lucía

In his study about man-place interrelations, Yori points out values or Topophiliac concepts that are necessary to analyze and evaluate in this context; among them we have:

The rootedness to the place.

The existing sense of rootedness among its inhabitants has allowed the neighborhood to keep the formal, spatial and functional attributes that have characterized it through time. This has matured its patrimonial and cultural vocation, and a deep sense of transcendence; which is why it has become a unique urban piece that treasures balconies, eaves, screen blocks, gargoyles and sun louvers; as "museum pieces" that face the threat of progress. (Fig. N° 9)

The "Lusitanos" recognize the neighbourhood as their "place of life", their present daily life, but also their possibility for the future. Their world and their life plan are always associated to the experience of local dynamics that become more intense as it approaches their home and their immediate space; and as such the concept of a tight social union that includes the domestic space –their home, their neighbor's – and the public space –their street- is clearly felt in the life and their everyday. They use the public space intensely, they keep it clean and maintained, they plant trees and they put ornaments in the streets and on the facades.

In the imaginary of the neighborhood has been reflected the sense of solidarity that the closeness of the interpersonal relationships maintained from the beginning of the community and remains active to this day. Santa Lucia represents for them the possibility of having a place that is their own where they can realize their dreams and expectations.

The sense of identity.

The "lusitana" community prides itself on its identity in any action scenario, in any realization or performance. To them it resembles a seized condition, and as such it is expressed in all daily performance contexts, within or out of their neighborhood. To them, residing Santa Lucia or having lived there, represents a reason to be proud of and that learning is always in their conscience and is passed from one generation to another.

Santa Lucia is assumed as a symbol and is interpreted as a Patron Saint, as a place, as an own space, as church, and in any case, it acquires a transcendental meaning that results in history. The devotion to the Virgin rises as a cohesion and identity factor, since its name is

part of the community's filiation and its collective memory. The church has tuned into a referential guidepost within an urban surrounding that is recognized as the "Santa Lucia Parish", demonstrating its identity principle with the community, with all interaction possibilities in the urban system. (Fig. Nº 10)

Sense of Integration.

According to what was previously stated, the integration of the neighbors with their surrounding and their community is strong and they show it in their participation in religious or cultural local events, where their commitment is felt; but beyond the eventual situations, they live the neighborhood intensely and are an essential part for the comprehension of its public space. Their participation is tangible, even when the initiatives come from external entities, always being willing to shared deliberation, to agree, to integrate with other citizens and national or international visitors, which is a prove of their disposition to reaffirm their relation with others and make agreements, proposals and social projects.

They meet everyday in front of their houses to comment on daily local and global happenings; to have food sales or events that are programmed in the neighborhood, as they have done since colonial times. They promote the unity of the neighborhood in different situations, urban and political plans, conforming community action groups in that effect. (Fig. Nº 11)

In Santa Lucia, the urban concept is a collectively motivated process, carried out in time and built on the foundation of the public space. Therefore, in the interaction of multiple cultures in that place and through time, the community has nourished its memory that has been anchored to the neighborhood in one way or another, in all its demonstrations.

Satisfaction of vital needs.

In their interest to make it sustainable in time for their generations, the neighbors have arranged and maintained the place in time; to satisfy their vital needs of shelter, protection and living together. Normally, the extended family (grandparents, sons, grandchildren) living together in the same house or very close, because they feel that the place is a shelter for their families.

This way, the perception of the space not only possesses material values but also sentimental attributes with a great load of transcendence in time where feeling, familiarity, friendship, fellowship keeps them there.

Satisfaction of political requirements.

The permanent attitude to defend interests and rights has been evident, especially when it comes to the right to remain as an united neighborhood, to the integrity of the community beyond its patrimonial attributes. Facing the whirlwind of the misunderstood "development" undertaken by local and national urban entities, their position has been firm confronting political situations, urban and renewal plans that are a threat to their spatial, environmental, and especially, social integrity.

Historically, local groups have assumed the role of representing the neighborhood before different entities –within and out of their neighborhood- and the search of answers to individual and collective requirements, in relation to their citizen rights; even though, at times, they have been opened to accept ideas of other citizens or foreign groups. Thus, we see how neighbors associations have been created, communal councils and other representative groups. In any case, the essence of the place's spirit is adverted inevitably in its social and spatial everyday life.

Final reflections.

The construction of a city is a multidisciplinary enterprise where collective interests must prevail over individual interests; the cities are the product of residing and living in society;

and it is the coexistence of two or more human beings which demands the establishment of agreements, and that is why when we speak of a collective unit, we understand that the depth and complexity of the agreements is greater.

In general terms, the practice of urban design and its statements in our cities as a discipline, are of recent experience, and in its implementation, citizen participation is scarcely promoted. Furthermore, the few citizen participation programs that exist have appeared recently. The education of the population has been neglected.

This is perhaps the reason why **the public**, which constitutes the essence of the urban, is identified in our cities as **the residual**. This implies a problem that goes beyond the spatial aspect and demands a way to understand the city.

The street, as the most conventional and common typology of the public space, is only understood in our context as a term which is related to the notion of displacement. Being in it implies a consumption of the time that is available. Generally, the sense of belonging of the resident with respect to public spaces does not exist or is disappearing more strongly each time. Santa Lucia resembles one of the few exceptions for preserving a lot of their original pedestrian condition.

On the other hand, people live in different places in the city and they move to other places to satisfy what they lack every day (work, supplies, recreation); these routes allow a peculiar identification with the urban landscape; but, where are the places in the city? What identifies Maracaibo as an urban phenomenon? Or better yet, through which elements are its inhabitants identified themselves with?

In Maracaibo, the identification with the city is done through its private and individual elements: home, work, friends, commerce; but in which moment is the marabinian aware of the city's public spaces, those spaces and places that identify and differentiate her in a collective way from other cities in Venezuela? Where is our urban architecture, our public spaces?

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Recently, the values of the local or architecture and urban sustainability of the communities begin to be handled by public and private organizations; and mainly, by the citizens.

The life of Santa Lucia neighborhood is an evidence, The social values of rootedness, its traditions and customs, its culture and everyday life, the richness of its landscape; its environmental values and of identification with the place, its particular urban characteristics have instilled an interiorized feeling in its residents, their ancestors and descendents.

Santa Lucia has an organic and disperse character, but the public space is the space of all and for all. Perhaps its cohesion as a neighborhood within Maracaibo's urban structure is originated in the appearance of El Milagro avenue, when it was built with "minimum destruction", in the historical downtown as well as in Santa Lucia (Sempere, 2000).

This operation was the first element that distorted the scale of the historical downtown and that –for Santa Lucia- meant the loss of the relation with the lake, even when the fact that it surrounds the neighborhood has contributed to preserve its physical and spatial homogeneity, which differentiate it greatly from its context. However, physically and at an urban level, the concept of the organizational structure of the space in Santa Lucia and its

strategic location, allow for an easy connection with the historical downtown and its surroundings, and other parishes through the structural axis that surround it.

The patrimonial value that the city has given to Santa Lucía, the neighbor's ownership for the place and vice versa, is a visible, constant and very transcendental fact; and constitutes the joining forces that will allow to guarantee the success and feasibility of the implementation of a sustainable development proposal. It is what will allow the capitalization and promotion of its particular context through appreciation, restoration and semantics processes of attributes that do not harm the existing equilibrium and give an answer to any imminent threats.

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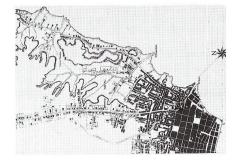

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