

APPROPRIATING MODERN ARCHITECTURE: DESIGNERS' STRATEGIES AND
DWELLERS' TACTICS IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE 1950S VENEZUELAN
SUPERBLOQUES

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Architecture and the Graduate Faculty of
the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

In the first half of the 20th century, masses of people moved from the decaying rural sector to Venezuelan cities in search of opportunities amid increasing revenues from the oil industry, which created greater demand for affordable housing. As the existing housing supply was deficient, they occupied Caracas' vacant lands on slopes and green areas and built ranchos (hovels) on uncontrolled *barríos* (informal settlements). By 1950, an estimated 50,000 ranchos lined the hills of Caracas. As part of the so called "*Batalla contra el Rancho*", (Battle against hovels), the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez implemented a housing plan that used high-rise *superbloques* as the emblematic building type. From 1951 to 1958, the government built 97 *superbloques* with 17,934 apartments. *Superbloques* started to decay as soon as the dictatorship collapsed. In the last 60 years, the conditions affecting residents have changed in many ways and since the replacement of the *superbloques* is not conceivable due to Venezuela's chronic housing shortages, their preservation is a present-day challenge. This dissertation is focused on the assessment of the present living conditions in the *superbloques* and compares two projects: *Cerro Grande*, the first *superbloque* built, that was aimed at middle income households and *23 de Enero*, an emblematic community with many *superbloques* built for low-income households. While *Cerro Grande* crystalizes the ambitions of the planners to align the *superbloque* with trending ideas of the modern movement, *23 de Enero* is an architecturally less elaborated solution addressing the increasing demand of low-cost housing solutions. This research builds an historical interpretation of the *superbloque* context and uses a qualitative research design that combines interviews with residents, on-site field observations, and the architectural analysis of the buildings themselves to assess the evolution of the physical organization. The research develops a theoretical framework based on Michel de Certeau's descriptions of the dialogue between producers and consumers expressed through the use of strategies as a means of control by the former and tactics or ways of operating to navigate the everyday life by the latter. The study assesses the dialogue between the strategies established by

policymakers, planners, and architects in the implementation and design of *superbloques* and the tactics developed by residents to appropriate and transform the housing to meet their needs. As part of its outcomes, the investigation compares and analyzes the physical characteristics of the buildings to outline the evolution of the *superbloque* design. The study contributes to the discussion about the preservation of *superbloques* by outlining the differences between the evolution of the physical layout, the processes of appropriation of residents, and the challenges for the improvement of the quality of life in the two scenarios represented in both case studies.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation could not be possible without the unconditional support that I received from my advisor Marie-Alice L'Heureux who accompanied me through all this five-year process with her great mentorship and kindness, even helping my family and me to feel Lawrence like home. I would also like to thank the members of my committee who helped shaped this research with their insights: Dr. Deborah "Deb" Adams, Dr. Farhan S. Karim, Dr. Kirk McClure, and Dr. Mahbub Rashid.

I have been fortunate to receive the support of Fulbright in my first two years and also the generous support of KU School of Architecture Design and Planning. I would like to thank Keith Diaz-Moore, Nils Gore, and Paola Sanguinetti for giving me continuous academic support and the opportunity to teach; and many thanks to Steve Padget, Kapila Silva, and Kent Spreckelmeyer for their constant guidance. My appreciation goes also to the School's staff for their effective support: Barb Seba, Bret Lawson, Patti baker, Cindy Muckey, Chris Bartholomew, Amy Hardman, and Henry Troyer. I will always have fond memories of my colleagues in the program especially of those who were there since I started: Julie Lawless, Nick Nepveux, Hadi Shateh, Sharmin Kader, and Nayma Khan.

I owe a great deal to the Universidad Central de Venezuela's Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo in Caracas for granting me a long leave of absence and also to the Consejo para el Desarrollo Científico y Humanístico (CDCH) for providing me continuous financial support. My deepest appreciation is to those who encouraged me to seek for a PhD and supported me in my application for a Fulbright scholarship: María Isabel Peña, Iris Rosas, and especially Guillermo Barrios. My gratitude goes also to

Beatriz Meza, who generously introduced me to her magnificent research on *superbloques*. I also would like to recognize the support of Gustavo Izaguirre, Alessandro Famiglietti, Ana María Marín, Milena Sosa, Joao de Freitas and Luís Polito. Also in Caracas, I owe my deepest gratitude to the two “gatekeepers” for their valuable help in the fieldwork: Ingrid in *Cerro Grande* and Carlos Gil in *23 de Enero*. This work is also dedicated to the residents of *Cerro Grande* and *La Cañada de La Iglesia* and *Sierra Maestra en el 23* that answered my call for their uninterested contribution.

In Lawrence, I would like to acknowledge the support and affection of Susy Mariscal and her family who helped us settle down in Lawrence and also for her insights in the development of this research. I also feel grateful of the people who welcomed me in Lawrence: Jayhawks Geri Lamer, Suzanne House, and Aaron Huerter and my dear friends in the Fulbright Association: Hodgje Bricke, Angela Páez, Bovid Atouta, Alonso Canales, Rodrigo Arancibia, Goran Sabah, Ibrahima Ba, Majo Miselem-Panko, Alexander Myronenko, Rafa Martins, Adriana Guzmán, and Artie Markosov.

Of course going through this process could not be possible without the constant patience, support, and love of my wife and daughters, Carla, Helena, and “dissertation baby” Carlota; they have been the best travel companions in this adventure. I would like to dedicate this achievement to them and also to my parents Rosa and Roberto who laid the foundations that allowed me to walk through the Campanile this year.

Para Joel y Dyna a quienes extraño mucho y debo mi pasión por la arquitectura y la investigación.

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I. Chapter One: Introduction and Research Scaffolding



Figure I-1. Superbloque Cerro Grande circa 1954

This research examines the inception and evolution of the Venezuelan *superbloques*, a building type developed in Venezuela by a group of avant-garde architects during the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez to address the increasing housing shortage in Caracas and other cities during the 1950s. I examine the evolution of these buildings under a lens that studies the interaction of residents and the building layout as an example of the negotiation between designers' strategies and residents' tactics. I examine the effects of the interaction between the strategies developed by the authorities, planners, and architects and the tactics developed by their residents in their process of adaptation to the building layout. I examine these interactions using the ecosystem perspective, addressing the different levels in which people adapt to the environment (family, community, society). The research analyzes the existing conditions by comparing two case studies of *superbloques*, representing different social groups

and architectural solutions to define the challenges faced by residents in attempting to improve their existing living conditions and possible actions to be taken in the future.

I. 1. What are Venezuelan *Superbloques*?

Superbloques is the popular name given to the high-rise, high-density housing projects developed by *Banco Obrero* (Worker's Bank) under the framework of the *Plan Nacional de Vivienda* (National Housing Plan) and *Plan Cerro Piloto* (Cerro Pilot Plan) implemented by the Venezuelan dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez between 1951 and 1958. A group of young Venezuelan architects working under the leadership of Carlos Raúl Villanueva in the *Taller de Arquitectura Del Banco Obrero* (TABO) was in charge of the design of these buildings. Most *superbloques* have around 115-150 apartments in 12-18-story structures and some of them are aggregations of modular units with 300 or 450 apartments. The evolution of the *superbloque* design is considered a "reductionist process" (Lopez 1986, Meza 2011, D'Auria 2013) spanning from its inception as a single multistory building, mimicking the Swiss architect (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris) Le Corbusier's *Unités*, to large complexes based on modular designs to increase economy. From an architectural viewpoint, *superbloques* can be inscribed within the high-rise high-density housing building type globally developed by modern architects in the middle of the 20th century using the ideology of the *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) more specifically of the Athens Charter which was heavily influenced by Le Corbusier (Conrads, 1970).

When Carlos Raul Villanueva and his team were commissioned by the government to implement this plan, they developed three initial designs: *Cerro Grande*, *El Paraíso*, and the unrealized *Quinta Crespo*. These three projects embodied the initial

ambitions of the plan and were celebrated by local and international critics (Hitchcock, 1972), but as the demand for more units was increasing they designed simplified versions of *superbloques* to build large complexes such as the emblematic *2 de Diciembre/23 de Enero*. When the dictatorship was overthrown on January 23, 1958, the goals of the national housing plan were surpassed in terms of number of units built but they proved insufficient to address the problem of the expansion of informal settlements bringing severe criticism aimed at both the policy aspects and the architectural and urban design of the projects (Lopez 1986, Meza 2011, Carlson, 1960). Despite its problematic implementation, *superbloques* are still considered a milestone in the history of housing policies developed in Venezuela.¹

The ideological framework that brought *superbloques* to the Venezuelan landscape aligned the dictatorship's need for monumentality with the positivism embedded in the modern movement's architectural philosophy. The regime's emphasis on public works was built upon an ideological project based on a positivistic stance that highlighted the transformation of the physical landscape as the main driving force in its agenda. This period was characterized by a construction boom fueled by the resources granted by increasing oil revenues. In this scenario, the dictatorship sought legitimacy through quantifiable results rather than through democratic achievements (Kolb, 1976; Coronil, 1997). In this vision, the advancement of Venezuelan society should be the logical consequence of the changes in the physical landscape made by importing landmarks of modernization. The high-rise, high-density, residential-building type fit perfectly within the ambitions of both their promoters and their planners, giving a

¹ Comparatively, no other policy traced similar objectives and built as many in such a short time. Other policies after 1958 also included similar building types and significant housing numbers but none of them was based on the proliferation of a specific building type with great impact in the city landscape.

magnificent emblem of technological advancement to the former and an opportunity to connect to the avant-garde architectural movement to the latter.

While ignoring previous successful housing projects developed by the State, Venezuelan authorities introduced *superbloques* as the definitive solution to the housing shortage and the curtailment of informal settlements, but the residents' experience had mixed results. Once they moved in, in some cases forcefully, and in others from their self-constructed shacks to new *superbloques*, residents developed tactics to adapt to the innovative living conditions defined by the *superbloque*'s planners. According to Eric Carlson, who directed the team that performed the CINVA² report in 1959, which is the first and only post-occupancy evaluation (POE) of Venezuelan *superbloques*, the residents were predominantly low-income with basic levels of education and rural background. The way in which these initial residents interacted with the buildings defied their planners' expectations, and issues were rapidly developing for administrators of *superbloques*. During the 60-year span of the *superbloques*' evolution, their communities have been adapting to life in these high-rise structures finding their own way to address the many issues exposed in Carlson's early study. Through this process they introduced changes to the buildings in both apartments and common areas, in many cases challenging the original intentions of the developers who viewed these buildings as tools for the re-education of the masses. This dissertation studies the friction between these contrasting forces; those who laid out the strategies and those who reacted to them through a set of tactics.

² Eric Carlson was the director of the *Centro Interamericano de Vivienda y Planeamiento* or Interamerican Center of Housing and Planning (CINVA) located in Bogotá, Colombia.

The continuing use of these *superbloques* in Caracas' landscape is currently undisputed as Venezuela's lack of affordable housing persists. Over time, *superbloques* also became entangled with the very problem they were supposed to solve as many of these buildings are now surrounded by informal settlements or *Barrios*, as they are known in Venezuela³. For many *superbloque* residents, moving is not an option as they find no better options in the housing market if they want to stay in the city. For these residents to improve their living conditions is therefore both a short and a long term challenge.

My interest in *superbloques* stems from many sources. First is my interest in Latin American modern architecture, its preservation, and more specifically, the works of Carlos Raul Villanueva, the most influential Venezuelan architect and leader of the team that brought *superbloques* to life. Secondly is my interest in housing as an architectural topic and housing policies in general, particularly after I was able to contrast the Venezuelan experience with both the American and Soviet experiences by comparing housing policies among socialist and capitalist cities. Third, is my own experience as a resident of large apartment complexes in Caracas and my familiarity with issues related to residential high-rise buildings. Lastly, another source of interest comes from my research background in informal cities that I developed in the Universidad Central de Venezuela's School of Architecture in Caracas, where I discovered a close relationship between urban informal settlements and public housing such as *superbloques*.

³ Informal settlements are a pervasive urban phenomenon in developing economies. They are known as *barrios* or *cerros* in Venezuela, *favelas* in Brazil, *villas miseria* in Argentina, *bidonvilles* in France, *tugurios* in Colombia and Central America, *chabolas* in Spain and *zona marginal* in many other Spanish-speaking countries. In Venezuela, the informal house is known as *Rancho*.

Beyond my interest in the topic, the examination of the *superbloque* experience can contribute to the ongoing discussion about the preservation and sustainability of large complexes of public housing, at a time when there are still many of these buildings in use or under construction not only in Venezuela but also around the world. While countries such as the U.S. have abandoned the high rise as a viable solution for affordable housing after a history of well-known failed examples such as Pruitt-Igoe in Saint Louis and Cabrini Green in Chicago, other countries still use this typology to address the need for affordable housing in growing urban centers. Venezuela's government is still addressing the issue of urban housing using high-rise and large concentrations of low-income communities which might have outcomes similar to that of *superbloques* when they were first occupied. For these reasons, I identify the need for an up-to-date assessment of these buildings, locally considered as problematic icons of Venezuela's attempt to leap into modernity.

I. 2. Significance of the Study

The goal of this research is to contribute to the discussion about the *superbloques'* future as a permanent component of the Latin-American metropolis by providing an up-to-date assessment of the evolution of its physical and living conditions in two case studies. As mentioned before, *superbloques* will endure for many years as their replacement is very unlikely as a result of Caracas' chronic housing shortage and the advocacy of their communities to keep their apartments as a main source of equity. The legacy of Caracas' *superbloques* has been recognized by local preservation authorities who have declared these building as cultural landmarks. As many other examples of modern architecture heritage sites, *superbloques* are evolving and living

entities in continuous transformation. Furthermore, and despite the recommendations of the CINVA report, the development of housing policies using high-rise building types has continued as a pervasive practice in Venezuela since 1958, bringing the discussion about their feasibility as affordable housing options to the foreground.

But the discussion to preserve these buildings is not only related to Venezuelan *superbloques* but also to the communities in the global south living in these high-rise, high-density complexes, where they make up a significant portion of the affordable housing stock. Furthermore, high-rises are still used as building types in developing economies to increase the affordable housing supply. Although not all high-rise buildings can be compared to *superbloques*, issues such as the provision of services, communal spaces, and community organizations have common characteristics when developing many levels above the ground. In Venezuela, new housing complexes promoted by the government are employing this building type to increase the affordable housing supply and increase the density in underdeveloped areas of cities.

On the issue of the preservation of modern architecture, this research traces the impact of user-defined changes on the abstract framework of modern architecture. *Superbloques* are now considered of public interest as pieces of modern heritage, but they are also active in the sense that their communities are in a continuous process of appropriation of the space, which impacts their physical reality. Moreover, in Caracas *superbloques* and the surrounding informal cities are now intertwined creating complex urban systems.

On the issue of current or future housing policies, recent events in Venezuela brought to the fore, the discussion about the State's role as promoter of public housing.

During the development of this research, the Venezuelan government started a new housing policy in many ways comparable to the 1951 National Housing Plan. In 2008 president Hugo Chavez started the *Misión Vivienda*, (Housing Mission) a nationwide housing policy focused on the construction of new housing developments aimed at low-income families. This new policy has many similarities with the plans that gave birth to the *superbloques*: first, it is a centralized action coordinated from governmental offices in Caracas. Second, it is also conceived by policymakers with a background in the military. Third, the program relies on private contractors, in this case, both national and international, fourth, as with TABO that earlier centralized the design of all housing projects, the Special Presidential Office of Plans and Projects, (OPPPE) the *Oficina Presidencial de Planes y Proyectos Especiales* also brought a significant number of these projects under its centralized control. But the most important similarity is the political objective: to reinforce the popularity of the government through the transformation of the physical landscape. This research attempts to provide a background for the development of policies such as this one.

I. 3. Research Purpose & Questions

The purpose of this research using qualitative methods is to gain an in-depth understanding of both the inception and evolution of *superbloques* and the living conditions of their communities to define and characterize the challenges facing their preservation. The research also responds to the need to update the evaluation of existing living conditions, something that has not been done systematically since 1960. The purpose is to examine these buildings through a framework that considers both the

ideological scaffolding developed by their promoters and designers and contrasts this with the agency of the residents in their process of adaptation.

I. 3. a. Research Questions

The research focuses on assessing the current conditions of the *superbloques* from the perspective of their residents, by evaluating the *tactics* developed to navigate the space determined by the designers through *strategies*. The main research question is what are the “ways of operating” developed by residents to appropriate the spatial layout and address the challenges set forth by the original design and how can that inform the implementation of policies and actions to preserve these buildings and improve the living conditions within them for their residents?

The study compares two case studies of *superbloques* to address this question: What are the variations in the evolution and perception of current conditions between the two types of *superbloques*? Are the needs of their residents the same?

The research also addresses these issues:

- What are the forces shaping the ideological framework that brought *superbloques* to Caracas’ landscape?
- How are the original characteristics of *superbloques* perceived by current residents?
- How has the physical configuration of the plan evolved and how does this describe the process of adaptation of the residents?
- How have the conditions described in the 1959 POE evolved over time? Have the residents been able to overcome the difficulties described in that report?

- How are the current challenges to preserve *superbloques* described by their residents?
- How can the experience of living in the *superbloques* help in the definition of preservation policies for similar cases and inform future housing projects?

I. 4. The Research Scaffolding

In order to explain the characteristics of this investigation, I use the research process scaffolding model explained by Michael Crotty in *The Foundations of Social Research*. This model describes the research process within the field of social sciences as a four-tier structure (Figure I-2.). From top to bottom these elements are epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods (1998 p. 3). This model is similar to others that I found in the literature showing the research structure as a linear system with the philosophical stance at one end and the tactics at the other (Groat, Wang, 2002; Creswell, 2003). Following this sequence, this section focuses on the description of the research scaffolding, focusing on these four elements.

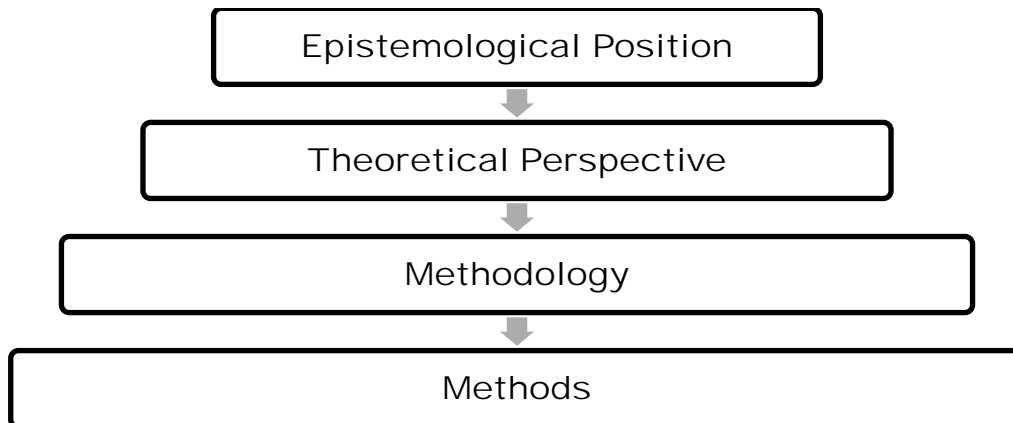


Figure I-2. Research Scaffolding as described by Michael Crotty (1998)

Table I.1 The Scaffolding of this Research Based on the Four Elements of Social Research (Crotty, 1998)			
Epistemological position	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Methods
Social constructionism	Interpretivism Ecosystem perspective	Qualitative Research (as described by Groat, Wang, 2002 and Creswell, 2003)	Historical interpretation Formal, spatial and structural analysis. Field Observations. Focused Interviews.

I. 4. a. Epistemological Position

On top of Crotty's scaffolding of the research process, the epistemological position guides the definition of the remaining components by shaping the philosophical foundation of the research process. Maynard (as cited by Crotty, 1998, p. 8) explains that "Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate." As alternatives to the epistemological position, Michael Crotty defines three main possibilities: objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. According to Crotty (1998), objectivism poses that meaning exists "apart from the operation of any consciousness" (p. 8), while constructionism understands that meaning is the results of "our engagement with the realities of our world" (ibid.). Subjectivism, in contrast, implies that knowledge comes from the imposition of meaning from subjects to objects (p. 9). Crotty emphasizes the opposition between the first two stances, which is usually translated in the dialectical struggle between qualitative and quantitative systems of inquiry.

My epistemological view in this research reflects Crotty's definition of constructionism. I address the perception of living conditions by residents and the assessment of architectural spatial and formal qualities. The conceptual framework was constructed as I engaged the history of *superbloques* and their residents. Some elements affecting the perception of living conditions by residents can be considered external to resident's construction of meaning, and can be evaluated using an objectivist stance, for example by measuring temperature, illumination, livable area, airflow in quantitative terms. My research, however, focuses on the examination of the act of building as a reflection of particular ideological stances and on finding links between the spatial and formal layouts of modern buildings and the needs and expectations of their residents. Analyzing the formal and spatial configurations and assessing the needs and expectations of residents implies the elaboration and definition of a conceptual framework that is based on the researcher having an active role observing the reality. This epistemological position is based on an ontological position that considers reality as "subjective and multiple as seen by participants in the study" (Groat, Wang, 2002, p. 28). In this case I attempt through interviews to include the perspective of residents in the assessment of these buildings.

Limitations of the Epistemological Position

Constructionism main limitation is implicit in its definition. As an interpreter builds meaning out of objects, the result is a new proposed system of meanings which is an object itself that requires another interpreter to engage it and make sense of it. While post-positivistic approaches build their validity around scientific methods, making the knowledge a generalizable, testable entity through external validity, the constructionist

must build credibility, therefore, a level of consensus, to strengthen the soundness of their research design and results. For example, Jane Jacobs's description of life in the city in her celebrated *The Death and Life of Great of American Cities* (1961) would not impact the discipline if a consensus did not validate her findings and the transferability of her conclusions to other cases.

Another limitation is that the foundations that sustain that consensus can change over time, thus hindering the validity of a proposed system of meaning. Specifically addressing my research, a proposal to investigate the preservation of *superbloques* is less engaging when there is a general consensus about the failure of modern architecture's social housing projects. However, recent trends within the architectural discipline such as the revision of the experience of modern architecture, the preservation of modern architecture and the vindication of participatory tools together with real-life forces such as the housing shortage in Venezuela have created a framework in which the topic of the future of *superbloques* is not only pertinent but also a matter of urgency. This constant displacement of the consensus within a discipline can offer a fragile platform on which to research.

At the level of research methods, the use of a mainly qualitative research design implies a more complex process to achieve credibility or trustworthiness. The need for triangulation, the use of multiple sources of data and the process of elaboration of the narrative involves time-consuming tasks. Also the potential vast amount of unstructured data that must be coded and analyzed is challenging.

I. 4. b. Theoretical Perspective: Elements of an Interpretative Approach

If the epistemological position provides the foundation of the research process, the theoretical perspective provides a lens to interpret and organize the data. Gary Moore (as cited by Groat, Wang, 2002) defines theory as “a set of interrelated concepts held as an explanation for observable phenomena by recourse to unobserved, more abstract principles” (p. 75). According to Michael Crotty (1998), the theoretical perspective “provides a context for the process involved and a basis for its logic and its criteria” (p. 66). As I gained a depth of understanding of *superbloques* and their communities from a constructionist position, I discarded a theory based on a positivistic approach using explanatory models of causality. Rather, the theoretical perspective is based on the interpretative approach, described by Crotty (1998) as looking for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social-life world” (p. 67). This approach contributes to the consideration of the needs and expectations of the *superbloques'* residents by positioning the researcher in their perspective. According to Thomas Schwandt (as cited by Groat, Wang, 2002), interpretivism has the “goal of understanding the complex world of lived experienced from the point of view of those who lived it” (p.186).

Strategies vs Tactics: a Theoretical Framework for this Research

The theoretical framework developed in this research considers the colliding forces of planners and residents as an example of a negotiation between strategies and tactics. My research frames the inception and evolution of Caracas' *superbloques*, as the physical manifestation of the dictatorship's positivist ideological framework, then analyzes the evolution of *superbloques* in terms of the agency of residents to adapt to

the physical setup. The strategies and tactics framework is based on Michel de Certeau's definition of the relationship between "producers and consumers" described in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). According to de Certeau, people have the ability to transgress and subvert the rules set by those in power by the means of their everyday practice in the definition of "ways of operation" (p. xiii). On one hand, this investigation frames the *superbloques* as a tool of the dictatorship's strategies to achieve their social engineering goals and also that of the architects who sought to impose their ideological framework. On the other hand, it also frames the actions of the residents as examples of the "ways of operations" or tactics.

The process of adaptation of people through the use of tactics is viewed through the lens of the ecosystem perspective, a theoretical framework that analyzes the adaptation of human beings to the environment. The ecosystem perspective analyzes the different systems in which people interact with the environment: family, neighborhood, community, and society (Miley et al, 2001, p.30) and recognizes a constant tendency for change. Chapter two provides further explanations of the theoretical issues impacting this research.

The producer/consumer dialogue is also informed by Henri Lefebvre's definitions related to the process of constructing meaning in space. In his book *The Production of Space* (1991) Lefebvre argues that meaning in space is constructed in three simultaneous realms continuously exchanging knowledge: the *perceived*, the *conceived*, and the *lived* dealing respectively with the *practices* of the space, the *representation* of the space and the *representational* spaces (p.40). Here I see a good opportunity to use the lens proposed by Lefebvre to better understand the different

forces impacting the evolution of *superbloques*. I see the vision of the dictatorship to promote social changes through interventions in the physical landscape as examples of spatial practices in the perceived realm. The architect's and planner's designs and their physical evidence are representations of conceived space; and the resident's perspective including the outcomes of their process of adaptation is included in the realm of the representational or lived spaces.

I. 4. c. Methodology: A Qualitative System of Inquiry

I chose a qualitative method of inquiry for this investigation because it offers a framework to understand the complexity of historical and social phenomena using an interpretive approach (Creswell, 2003; Groat and Wang, 2002). Unlike quantitative approaches that are focused on "a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population" (Creswell, 2003, p. 153) the qualitative system allows me to build an interpretation based on in-site observation, using a narrative to describe and make sense of the phenomena. However, this is not a purely qualitative method as numeric data do come from sources such as the analysis of the buildings or the software used to process qualitative data. I used these pieces of numeric data to make sense of other aspects examined under qualitative methods. According to Linda Groat and David Wang (2002) there are four aspects that define the qualitative inquiry that I consider pertinent for this research: 1) "An emphasis on natural settings" 2) "A focus on interpretation and meaning" 3) "A focus on how respondents make sense of their own circumstances" and 4) "The use of multiple tactics" (pp. 176-77). John Creswell (2003) also defines other characteristics of qualitative research that I consider useful when designing a research framework for this dissertation such as the impact of the role and

background of the researcher and the flexible framework that allows a change of direction during the process (p. 181-182)

Table 1.2 Research's Qualitative Framework		
Main Characteristics	Methods	Validation
<p>Groat and Wang (2002)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) An emphasis on natural settings 2) A focus on interpretation and meaning 3) The use of multiple tactics <p>Creswell(2002)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Impact of the role and background of the researcher 2) Flexible framework that allows changing direction during the process. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Construction of the historical background 2) Architectural Analysis (Formal, Spatial, Structural) 3) Field Observations By-products of use, adaptations for use, displays of self and public messages 4) Focused interviews Open ended-questions <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Comparative analysis of case studies 2) The before/after snapshot 3) Different perceptions of current conditions according to system (Apartment, Building, Community and Context) 	<p>Singleton, Straits (2010) Exploratory research before developing instruments</p> <p>Creswell(2002)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data triangulation • Clarification of researcher bias • Uses of rich, thick description to convey findings

The emphasis on the natural setting is relevant as this investigation focuses not only on these buildings as abstract entities defined by their common architectural type but also as specific cases in a specific context. As this study also focuses on examination of living conditions, on-site data collection provides meaningful evidence to be analyzed and interpreted. The respondent's reactions and responses through the focused interviews and the evidence of their agency collected through field observation will lay out the foundation of the narrative. The use of multiple tactics allows increasing the understanding of the events from different perspectives, therefore increasing the reliability of the findings. The theoretical framework proposed attempts to examine the evolution of *superbloques* as a dialogue between planners and residents represented in

the duality strategies versus tactics and the perception of the frictions of these forces in different levels. Following this central purpose, the proposed methods are oriented to define the frictions between these forces, by trying to capture the before/after changes and the perceptions of occupants on different levels of the ecosystem perspective. Other aspect that I am comparing is the ideological framework of those who planned these buildings and the popular perception of them by including pieces of popular culture that describe the *superbloques*, the modernity that they embodied, and the aspirations of those who inhabited them.

Validation: Building Trustworthiness

In a qualitative study such as this one, building trustworthiness is a tactic to validate findings rather than generalizability, which is a validating tool for quantitative systems of inquiry. According to Creswell, The validity of the qualitative research “does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative research” (p.195), and reliability and generalizability “play a minor role” (Ibid.). Overall, I seek to build trustworthiness by developing coherence in the description of the findings based on an intensive examination, description, and analysis of the data collected. More specifically, I seek for validation through specific tools such as the triangulation of different methods (Creswell, 2006; Singleton, Straits, 2010) and the use of a digital measurement tool for qualitative analysis. Other specific actions include the completion of exploratory studies directly on the site before designing the questionnaire.

Another tool to build trustworthiness is the use of a comparative process in which I analyze two case studies simultaneously. The two case studies represent contrasting variations of the *superbloque* building type and different stages of its evolution. The two

communities are also different in terms of socio-economic characteristics, so a contrasting set of findings is expected. The narrative is built upon this constant comparison of the two case studies. Chapter IV provides further description of these two case studies.

Clarification of bias and role of the researcher

Another aspect related to the process of building trustworthiness is the clarification of the bias that the researcher might bring to the study (Creswell, 2006). In clarifying this aspect I would like to describe my own process of approach to this problem. The interest of *superbloques* grew out of my previous work on informal cities and my interest in mid-century modern architecture. As I have studied the dynamics behind the formation of the informal city, I came across the history of *superbloques* and observed that they have followed their own process of informalization, as people transformed the original configuration of these buildings by changing existing features and introducing new elements. *Superbloques* were conceived to replace the slums, but eventually they themselves became engulfed by them and followed a similar path of informality. From this perspective, I see that *superbloques* and informal cities are now intertwined both physically and symbolically.

I have approached *superbloques* and their residents to advocate for both the cause of modern architecture and the resident's agency in its transformation, by trying to destabilize the current consensus about its failure as a social project which is strongly influenced by the narratives of failure of the residential and urban modern projects, exemplified in the collapse of American projects such as Pruitt-Igoe in Saint Louis or Cabrini-Green in Chicago. My interest in *superbloques* is part of my broader interest in

modern architecture and its role in the transformation of the architectural discipline in the early 20th century after more than 500 years of classicism (Piñon, 1997). After a period of great expansion and achievement in Latin America, modern architecture entered a period of decline in the late 1960's largely influenced by the global criticism that described its failure in the social field, heavily characterized by the early critique of the urban project of Brasilia's pilot plan (Holton, 1987). However, after 40 years of failed attempts to redefine a new ideological framework, modern architecture is again the focus of interest in many Latin American architectural schools, and preservation of the modern heritage has become part of the agenda after many years during which modern buildings such as the *superbloques* decayed⁴. In Venezuela, the inclusion of the University City of Caracas designed by Carlos Raul Villanueva in UNESCO's world heritage sites list in 2000 defined a milestone in this process, bringing modern architecture to the spotlight.

As a resident of Caracas and growing up in a middle-class family, I have had the experience of living in apartments in medium-and high-rise buildings, which is the common type in Caracas because of geographical constrains. This experience has proved to be very useful when designing and developing this research as I have an understanding of the overall challenges of inhabiting this building type and the community issues involved. In *Cerro Grande*, I found similarities in the way the community is arranged compared to where I have lived, which allowed me to communicate with the residents more effectively.

⁴ An evidence of this renewed interest is the current exhibition of Latin American Architecture in New York's Museum of Modern Art "Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980" curated by Barry Bergdoll and Patricio del Real.

I. 4. d. Developing the Methods

This research uses four methods to analyze the two pre-selected case studies: 1) the historical interpretation of the context in which *superbloques* were forged, 2) the description and analysis of the original organization, 3) the collection of traces (material changes and patterns of use) through field observations, and 4) the interaction with residents using focused interviews. The last three methods provide three different sets of data to triangulate in order to increase the soundness of the narrative of the findings.

Physical Layout Analysis

The amount of information available about the buildings in photographs, plans, and text allows the reconstruction of the original buildings using digital modelling tools such as Autodesk AutoCAD and Google Sketchup. These models are useful because they allow assessing the original designs using architectural research tools to synthesize and highlight specific aspects such as the formal composition, spatial design, structural design and the circulation layout. I built digital models of the two buildings studied as case studies using Google Sketchup without including modifications over time. I am using these digital models to analyze and compare architectural features in the case studies and as the basis to map user-defined changes to the original structure. These models proved to be very useful in understanding the original design and the differences between the case studies in terms of physical characteristics, including the layout configuration, dimensions and interaction between formal and spatial systems. The physical analysis builds upon aspects related to the conceived space defined by Lefebvre by making evident the intentions and *practices* of the designers in their

conception of space. Chapter IV provides further details and the outcomes of this process.

Field Observations: Looking for Traces

Most people see only a small number of clues in their physical surroundings; they use only a few traces to read what the environment has to tell them. Observing physical traces systematically is a refreshing method because through fine-tuning, it turns a natural skill into a useful research tool. (Zeisel, 2006, p.159)

Certainly, as architects we are used to gaining knowledge of the world through what we experience visually in a systematic way; and the understanding of architectural reality increases when we are able to experience buildings first-hand. As architects we can approach buildings without the burden of cultural preconceptions. In this research, field observations look for what John Zeisel (2006) defines as physical traces, pieces of evidences of previous activities that have been consciously or unconsciously left behind by the users (p. 159). The observation of traces is useful because we can “infer how an environment got to be the way it is” (p. 189) and, in this particular case, the way in which it contributes to understanding how residents transformed the physical environment to meet their needs. When looking for physical traces Zeisel proposes four basic categories to look for: 1) by-products of use, 2) adaptations for use, 3) displays of self, and 4) public messages. The field observation in the case studies provided examples of these four categories. Evidence was collected in the form of pictures and videos through direct visits to the site and through research assistants. The field observation proved to be useful to build a rich description of the physical changes

performed by residents in the buildings. Chapter IV provides a summary of the field observations using the classification proposed by Zeisel.

Focused Interviews

From the methods deployed in this research, interviews provided meaningful insights to draw conclusions to address the main research questions. I conducted interviews to query residents directly about their perception of their environment, everyday challenges, changes they have experienced, and their ideas for the future. The interview process was conducted in two stages. The first visit to Caracas in March 2012 provided the opportunity for me to get to know community leaders in one of the *superbloques*, who worked as gatekeepers and who facilitated the site visits and to establish participants for the research. The informal conversations with these leaders and the on-site observations provided a background that was later used to design a semi-structured questionnaire for a second stage of interviews. This questionnaire was designed using open-ended questions and a short survey to measure levels of user satisfaction on the issues discussed: building, apartment, community, and context. Although the research design follows a cross-sectional design (Singleton; Straits, 2010) therefore increasing the attention in current day perceptions, the respondents were almost always eager to provide their own vision of changes over time, particularly those residents who have been living in these buildings for a long time. As I was unable to schedule a second trip to Caracas in May 2014, the focused interviews were completed by phone. I directly interviewed 22 *superbloque* residents in both case studies. One to two hours interviews provided much in-depth information about the history of *superbloques*, existing challenges and future directions. I directly transcribed and

translated the interviews from Spanish to English in order to increase the trustworthiness of the research design. Both the field observations and the interviews help to build a framework of the lived space defined by Lefebvre by exposing the residents' opinions and actions as they engage in the *lived* space. Chapter five provides the findings from the interview process and the transcription of all interviews are included in Appendix 2.

Sampling

As the population in both case studies is dissimilar, I define the initial sampling using a clustered method (Singleton Straits, 2010), looking for a similar number of respondents from both building types and social groups. One group of interviews is of residents of the early *superbloque* designed for middle-income families and another group represents the residents of the later *superbloque* originally designed for low-income families. I preferred using the clustered method to ease the challenge of a probability form of sampling that would arise given the dissimilar size of the population in both case studies. This study also does not focus on a statistical analysis of the data. The preliminary goal was to obtain a similar number of interviews in both case studies using a referral or "snowball" sampling method (Singleton, Straits 2010; Cournoyer, Klein, 2000). The referral process was different in both cases as I obtained fourteen interviews in one case study and nine in the other. However, in both cases saturation was reached as the interviews focused on specific aspects. In spite of the difference of sample sizes, the overall length of text is very similar in both cases, providing a similar foundation for the data analysis.

I. 4. e. Data Analysis

The analysis of the original design of the projects using the digital models of the buildings is contrasted with the findings obtained through field observation to build a narrative about the evolution of the physical layout. These findings are presented using graphic representation tools comparing before and after images.

Data reduction of the interviews was performed through a two-stage coding process. In the first stage four categories of codes were defined according to the main environmental systems to be studied: apartment, building, community and context. For each of these categories four types of texts have been coded: perception (positive, neutral, and negative) challenges, and proposed changes. I used the QSR *NVivo* software to code the 23 interviews identifying the text that matched the categories. *NVivo* allows these pieces of text to be grouped together according to topics and compares the number of text codes per category proposed allowing the visualization of the analysis using graphs. A second stage of the coding came after the definition of "challenges" became clearer as I examined the text of the interviews. In this second stage, I used the *InVivo* coding tool to identify specific categories of challenges in the interviews. This second stage provided a more precise panorama of the perception of challenges from the two groups of residents. Another resource that I used to analyze the information from the interviews is the "word cloud" obtained using tools within the *NVivo* program. The word clouds utilized in this research represents the 100 most frequent words used with relative sizes according to the number of repetitions. I produced word clouds for each topic, which helped me refine meanings through the map of words used by residents in their questionnaire answers.

Limitations of the Research Design

Qualitative design provides advantages in its holistic approach, its flexible framework, and its ability to construct meaning out of activities and objects (Groat, Wang, 2002) but it also has general limitations such as an uncontrollable amount of data, the absence of a formal structure, and its usual conflicts with positivists' stances. In this particular research, I found additional limitations that impacted different stages of the investigation process.

1. Since the interviews were conducted in Spanish, the data analysis required additional effort, time, and consistency in translating the text.
2. I anticipated that the interviewing process might be long and difficult to schedule. The snowballing process was slower than expected, particularly in *23 de Enero*. The schedule of interviews depended heavily on the availability of potential respondents. These issues were alleviated by the fact that there is no significant time difference between Lawrence, Kansas, and Caracas, Venezuela, and also by the fact that most of these interviews were conducted in summer and on weekends. The process of interviewing took four months from late May to early September 2014.
3. Because of my own inability to visit the buildings and their communities after the initial visit, I hired a research assistant in Caracas who helped me gain access to respondents in *23 de Enero* and provided me with a very complete photographic registry.
4. The phone interviews created a distance that might have alienated respondents in the interview process. I used my knowledge of the local culture, etiquette, and

idioms to improve the experience of the interview, sometimes even letting the respondent go outside the interview structure so he or she could feel more comfortable.

5. The participant's responses might have been influenced if they became aware of the significance of the building. Philippe Boudon (1979) also mentions this issue in his research on Le Corbusier's housing complex in Pessac, France. Boudon discovered that participants wanted to change their answers as soon as they knew that architect Le Corbusier had designed their homes, as he was already a well-respected figure in France at the time. I found that almost all people I interviewed were aware of the cultural significance of the *superbloques*. Some respondents in *Cerro Grande* were aware that this building was a design based on a European project, and people in *23 de Enero* mentioned Carlos Raúl Villanueva very often as they knew he authored their project, (although he was not in direct charge of the design). I found that this could have influenced the perception of the apartments and the buildings in both case studies.
6. Data collection and analysis is complex, involving a large amount of recordings, different types of answers, and many elements to code and group, creating challenges to understand this as a whole. To address this, I limited the sources, systematized the results of the field observation, and used the software tool QSR *NVivo* to analyze the data from the interviews, including data reduction and coding. This tool proved very useful not only to organize, reduce and code the data but also to visualize the findings graphically.

7. An aspect that I did not anticipate at the outset of the research but could have impacted the interviews is the identification of the respondents with one side or the other of the current political polarization of Venezuela⁵. Although I did not include any question related to political views and I avoided at any time to give evidence of my own perspective on this issue, I noticed that the majority of the people I interviewed in *Cerro Grande* are in opposition to the current regime, and the people from *23 de Enero* are mainly pro-government. Furthermore, I found that people from *23 de Enero* were less prone to discuss negative issues and challenges than people from *Cerro Grande*. For example, many people from *23 de Enero* clarified during the interviews that problems are not the result of the current governmental policies but issues that began a long time ago. Another aspect that could have been influenced by the political stance of the respondent is the perception of change over time, with people from *Cerro Grande* having a strong negative perception compared to those from the *23 de Enero* especially about the context of the respective projects.

I. 4. f. Ethical Issues

Royce Singleton and Bruce C. Straits (2010) define two sources for research on ethical issues: “the society at large and the research profession” (p. 47). They also describe an overall framework for ethical research by defining three major areas of concern 1) data collection and analysis 2) the ethical treatment of human subjects and 3) the ethics of social responsibility (ibid. p. 74). These three major areas are

⁵ Since Hugo Chávez took power in February 1999 the political landscape in Venezuela is heavily polarized between those who support his government and those who oppose it. This conflict still exists in 2015, two years after Chávez death.

systematized by Creswell, who suggests a step-by-step guide to address ethical issues in a research design. According to Creswell (2003) in a given research there are ethical considerations to address at each stage: in defining the problem and research purpose statement, during data collection, in data analysis, writing and dissemination. The summary of the research issues and the actions taken to avoid or minimize them are in table I.3.

Table 1.3 Research Ethical Issues	
Stage of research (Creswell, 2003)	Actions taken to avoid or minimize ethical issues
Research Problem “identify a problem that will benefit individuals being studied”(p.63)	The discussion of the preservation of <i>superbloques</i> and the evaluation of living conditions will affect residents positively by providing tools to develop new policies and action toward the improvement of living conditions.
Purpose Statement “need to convey the purpose of the study that will be described to participants” (p.63)	During the referral process, participants were informed of the purpose of the study in a clear and sincere manner. Gatekeepers and interviewers were invited to ask questions about the implications of this research. I identified my affiliations with both the University of Kansas and the Central University in Caracas.
Data collection “need to respect the participants and the sites of research” (p.64)	Permission obtained from the University of Kansas Human Subject Committee. Use of oral consent forms in interviews that included clarification of the preservation of anonymity, the storage and preservation of the data, and their right to withdraw from the study. The physical layout (apartments, buildings and context) was not altered during the study. People are not included in photographs.
Data Analysis Anonymity, storage, ownership and accuracy (p.66).	Total anonymity of the respondents who are identified by number. Records of interviews are stored safely by the researcher and will not be shared. Direct control of the researcher on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription and translation of interviews. • Data reduction, coding, and description of findings.
Dissemination Language and bias; falsifying, suppressing or invention; misuse of results; description of details (p.67).	Description of the methodology in the final document. Neutrality in the description of findings and triangulation of sources Avoid the use of this research to describe, frame or take positions on the current political situation of Venezuela. Use all available data.

II. Chapter Two: Strategies and Tactics, a Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework of this research combines two constructs to organize, describe, and analyze the data and to build a narrative of the findings from interviews and field observations of *superbloques*. The first construct is the dialogue between *strategies* and *tactics* proposed by Michel de Certeau (1984) to describe the ways in which ordinary people (consumers) use tactics to create meaning in the space established by structures of power (producers) as strategies. With this stance, de Certeau, explains how people navigate and subvert power structures such as the ones described by Michel Foucault that are the products of the increased complexity of governmental systems that have evolved since the Enlightenment. In this research, the dialogue between strategies and tactics is represented by the contrasting forces of *superbloque* designers in the one side and residents in the other. This theoretical construct is merged with the ecosystem perspective, as described by Carel Germain and Martin Bloom (1999) and Karla K. Miley, Michael O'Melia, and Liliana DuBois (2011). The ecosystem perspective is a generalist theory used in social sciences to frame the process of interaction between human beings and the environment. The ecosystem perspective allows me to assess and analyze the dialectical strategies and tactics as part of a process of adaptation of humans to the environment. Besides these two main constructs, there are secondary constructs related to the definition of strategies and tactics influencing the theoretical perspective of this research.

Table II.1 Research's theoretical perspective			
Framework	Strategies and tactics Michel Foucault's alignment between intentions of architects and the practices of freedom by residents Michel de Certeau's <i>producers and consumers</i> dialogue. Henri Lefebvre's three layers in the process of construction of meaning in space: the perceived, the conceived and the lived.		Ecosystem perspective Germain & Bloom (1999) Miley et al. (2011)
Interpretivism Phenomenology	Theoretical issues related to the definition of strategies	Theoretical issues related to the definition of Tactics	Ongoing interaction between subjects and the environment. Constant search for the "goodness of fit" Different systems: Family, neighborhood, community, society, and nation.
	Buildings as reflections of power (Thomas A. Markus, 1987; Foucault, 1984) The Communal house CIAM/Le Corbusier Modern planning ideals (Peter Rowe, 1993)	The practiced space "Ways of Operating" (De Certeau, 1984) Flexible housing (Till/Schneider, 2007)	

II. 1. Foucault: Practices of Freedom versus Liberation Machines

The ways in which power shapes the built environment through the disciplines of architecture and planning is described by Michel Foucault in an interview with Paul Rabinow (1984) as a process that starts in the eighteenth century as a result of the increasing complexity of the "art of government" from the structures of power that start "the development of reflection upon architecture as a function of the aims and techniques of the government of societies" (p. 239). According to Foucault, from this point onwards, architecture and planning entered the political discussion to address policies that improved the order in different aspects of social life: "every discussion of politics as the art of government of men necessarily includes a chapter or a series of

chapters on urbanism, on collective facilities, on hygiene, and on private architecture” (Ibid. p.240).

Foucault explains that buildings can be used to implement strategies that move toward the organization and arrangement of functions that are conceived as element of order and control. Furthermore, Thomas A. Markus (1987) affirms that buildings and architecture in general became instruments of social order after the Enlightenment. Markus further examines how buildings reflect structures of order defined by society and thus become instruments used to implement policies of social control. “Buildings are primarily social objects. They carry meanings for society in general, and occupants and users in particular, which relate to asymmetries of power” (p.467). Markus uses this assumption to explain how buildings have been conceived as “classificatory devices” designed according to programs or prescriptive texts developed by society “to define and reproduce social structures, and to elaborate the meanings of relationships” (Ibid. p.468). Markus uses this theoretical view to develop a tool to reveal buildings' schematic system of classification of spaces.

Foucault (1984) explains that some architects have attempted to subvert the structures of power by proposing innovative configurations based on technical advancements and the desire to improve the quality of life. However, when discussing the role of architects such as Le Corbusier in attempting to create liberating utopias in the field of architecture and planning, Foucault disdains their results because of the impossibility of creating a “liberating machine”, as liberty itself cannot be contained by a physical reality and the exercise of freedom is determined by the practices of people and not necessarily by the built environment (p.245). However, when asked by Paul

Rabinow about the role of architecture to solve social issues, Foucault (Ibid.) responds that architecture “it can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom” (p.246). This statement rationalizes the dynamics and potential conflict between architects and residents in utopian projects such as the *superbloques*, where the intentions of architects and the practices of the residents are not aligned. But in what ways do people act when disjunction is evident and the conflict between intentions and practices arise? How do people adapt to these pre-fabricated environments? The main research question proposed in this investigation is focused on these two inquiries.

II. 2. De Certeau’s Producers / Consumers Dialogue

From another perspective, Michel de Certeau also reflects on the interaction of people within the structures created by the state or the official power of architects and engineers through the dialectal interaction between *producers* and *consumers*. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau asserts that while producers develop structures to sustain their power by using *strategies* to shape space, consumers in turn dwell, interact, and can influence changes in these structures by using *tactics*.⁶ According to de Certeau, consumers use everyday practices to construct meaning that do not necessarily match the expectations of the producers and, moreover, could eventually shape the process of the development of strategies. From this perspective, the practices of everyday life can release consumers from the control of producers and reshape their immediate environments and dwellings. In this approach, de Certeau invites us to look to everyday practices or “ways of operating” in which consumers “re-

⁶ Diverging from the military framing of tactics as subordinate to strategies, Michel de Certeau positions tactics rather as a democratic reaction to strategies.

appropriate the space organized by techniques of socio-cultural production” (p. xiv) thus creating an active resistance to the strategies defined by producers.

In the role of producers, promoters and architects conceived *Superbloques* as the logical solution for housing issues but this development did not address the expectation of its potential residents. Rather, the planner and policymakers focused on housing shortages as a quantitative issue not understanding the aftermath or the unforeseen consequences of the large housing-production policy. The residents were conceived as abstract entities expressed in numeric values, but once they took over the buildings, as consumers they became active agents that interacted with the context in unexpected ways by developing adaptation tactics not anticipated by designers.

II. 2. a. Henri Lefebvre’s Triade in the construction of meaning in space

According to Lefebvre, space is a social production that “contains and dissimulates social relationships” and “is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)” (p.82-83). These relationships are explained in three realms. 1) Spatial practices that encompasses the production and reproduction of social practices by the society as a whole; 2) Representations of space or conceptual space that includes the realm of disciplines such as planners and architects being the most dominant of the three realms; and 3) Representational spaces which is the space “as directly lived” (p.39) by inhabitants and often defined as the real space. According to Lefebvre, those who conceptualize the space in the realm of the perceived, bridge the gap between the spatial practices between society and reality. In this case, the planners and architects at TABO conceptualized the housing for the masses more closely to the ideals of the government in their attempt to define new spatial practices in society

through the definition of new ideals. In this research I assess the impact of conceptualized space on the everyday life of residents by addressing the three realms proposed by Lefebvre: analyzing the historical context to inform the spatial practices of the dictatorship, analyzing the buildings to understand the conceptualized space that is the result of designers attempting to represent their conception of new social practices and the ultimate effect on people's lives by investigating the dynamics of the inhabitants in the process of appropriation.

II. 2. b. Examples of the Interaction of Producers and Consumers in Architecture

In the architecture field, and more specifically within the history of modern architecture and planning, there are examples of the complex dialogue between producers and consumers defined by de Certeau. An early project for workers' housing in Pessac, France, by Le Corbusier describes the issue of the dialogue between producers and consumers and its outcome. Commissioned by a factory owner, Le Corbusier designed a neighborhood of attached houses for workers in 1924 using his innovative ideas about architectural design and residential living. Over time, the residents transformed the pristine houses that Le Corbusier had designed with clear geometries until the original layouts were very difficult to identify (Boudon, 1979). The housing functioned unexpectedly in Pessac as a flexible framework that allowed residents to exercise their freedom of choice by adapting their own homes to suit their lifestyle and/or express new meanings. This marks an early example of residents solving their housing problem by freely altering their material environment, thus decoupling the intentions of architects and designers from the practices of everyday life.

Philippe Boudon (Ibid.) presented the Pessac case as a rich example of how residents appropriated the framework of modern architecture freely to define their own needs and demonstrate their active participation in resolving their housing issues. According to Boudon, Pessac could not be considered a failure as the modifications the residents effectively introduced are a positive outcome based on the initial layout. By introducing the modifications, Pessac residents adapted to the existing configuration by improving the physical layout in a way the producer (in this case Le Corbusier) was not expecting.

Another example of this producer/consumer dynamic is in the projects developed by the French to expand African cities within their colonial domain such as Paul Écochard projects in Casablanca, Morocco, that attempted to create segregated solutions for multiple ethnical groups living in Casablanca. Aziza Chaoui (2011) asserts that Écochard's team developed specific housing types according to resident's ethnic background. Among these types, a housing block designed by the *Atelier des Bâtitseurs ABTAT Afrique* attempted to adapt to local conditions and culture by introducing balconies on the façade. The way in which people appropriated these spaces changed their original purpose as open semi-private outdoor space and incorporated them fully into the private interior areas of the house, violating the architects' proposed formal compositional rules.

In order to explain the dialectical relationship between tactics and strategies, de Certeau uses a conceptual distinction between *space* and *place*. De Certeau (1984) defines *place* as a stable reference of elements in which we move, while space is the result of the interaction of “vectors of directions, velocities and time variables” (p. 117). Space is a “practiced place,” the result of the interactions between humans and

motionless elements in reality. Humans make sense of place by interacting with it, therefore, creating space. The contrast between place and lived space is a useful conceptual tool to read and understand the interventions of people in their housing during field observations of the *superbloques*.

Superbloques are built examples of Foucault's description of planning and architecture as tools to impose order on society through structures of power. Although based on Le Corbusier's ideological framework that sought to liberate people through technological advances in architecture, the housing elicited conflicts in the way people utilized the space reflecting a de-coupling between the intentions of designers and the practices of everyday life as described by de Certeau that underscored architecture's inability to liberate the residents as Foucault had asserted. This de-coupling however, created a dynamic between people and their "lived spaces" that allowed residents to operate in and appropriate control of the built environment in order to adapt it to their needs while adapting themselves to their environment. This process of adaptation/re-adaptation occurs at different environmental scales from the home, to the community, and hence to the urban environment.

II. 3. The Ecosystems Perspective

To reinforce the theoretical perspective of this research, I use the ecosystems perspective to introduce an understanding of the many environmental scales at which residents perceive their reality. The ecosystems perspective conceptualizes the continuous exchange between individuals and the physical environment. According to Miley et al. (2011) "in the ecosystems view, persons and environments are not separated but exist in ongoing transaction with each other" (p.28). The ecosystems

perspective does not analyze the individual and the environment as separate entities but intertwines them in a mutually reciprocal exchange.

Besides seeing the duality of "person and environment" as a unit of analysis, the ecosystems perspective also considers human development as an evolutionary and changing process (Miley et al, 2011), meaning that the interactions between people and the environment "influence, shape and sometimes change each other" (Germain, Bloom, 1999, p.10). The ecosystems perspective sees these interactions as a result of the process of adaptation, or the constant search for the "best fit" between people and their environment. According to Germain and Bloom (Ibid.) there is a "general tendency toward adaptation" embedded in all people's actions:

Actions to ensure survival of the species are built into the organic evolution of *Homo sapiens* as with all living things. Even though human beings have replaced organic evolution (i.e., genetic mutation and environmental selection) with cultural evolution (i.e., changes in knowledge, technology and social organization), we can still assume the general actions people take with regard to themselves and their environments are survival oriented. Gross survival has been replaced, in most nations, by more subtle adaptations to the highly varied social and physical environments (p.11). "*Adaptations* are continuous, change-oriented, cognitive, sensory-perceptual, and behavioral processes people use to sustain or raise the level of fit between themselves and their environment" (Germain and Gitterman, as cited by Germain, Bloom, 1999, p.11)

The ecosystems perspective also assesses the factors that facilitate or impede the adaptation process, considering that there are elements that are under the control of people while others factors are beyond their control. *Superbloque* residents for example

have control over their apartments and collectively over common areas but changes to their context (for instance, the accretion of the barrios around their housing) are out of their reach, often requiring the action of external forces such as the State to influence the process of adaptation.

The ecosystems perspective considers the different social systems as *holons* (Miley et al, 2011) or parts of a larger system (Figure II-1). The individual immediate system is the "family" which forms part of the larger community. The community, in turn, is part of society and the latter is part of the national system. People transact with the environment in all these systems creating a dynamic interaction in the practices of everyday life.

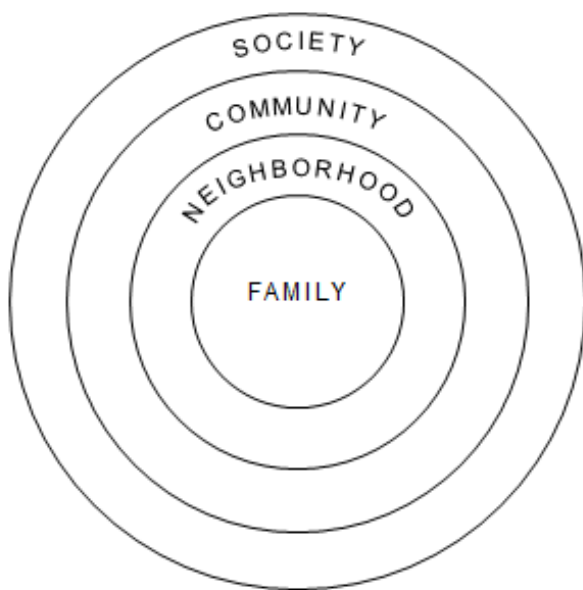


Figure II-1. Generic diagram of the ecosystems perspective based on the literature.

In considering tactics or the “ways of operating” using the ecosystem perspective, I organize the data according to the physical setting related to the particular system in which the transactions are relevant. Therefore, I consider the apartment as

the physical organizer of the family system, the building as the organizer of the neighborhood, the community as an entity in and of itself, and the context as a representation of the society. I use these four aspects to organize the overall inquiry and to narrate the findings of this study.

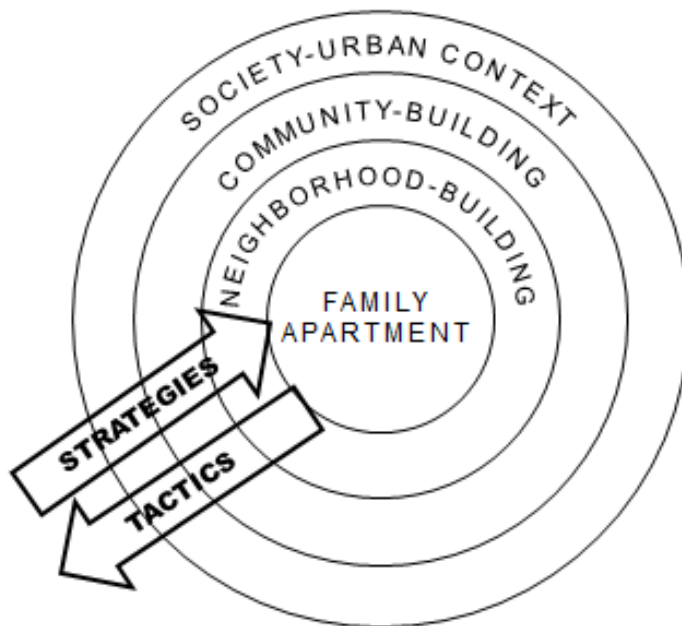


Figure II-2. Diagram of the theoretical framework proposed for this research showing the contrasting forces of strategies and tactics overlapping in the ecosystem.

The theoretical framework developed through this research, (Figure II-2.), is the result of overlapping the ecosystem-perspective model with the dialectical models espoused by de Certeau and Foucault represented in the dynamics of strategies and tactics. The model represents the concentric circles of the ecosystem perspective with the levels of social environments translated according to the metrics investigated (perception of the apartment, the building, the community and the context) and the reciprocal forces represented by the residents' tactics and the State's strategies to organize the physical reality of residents. The theoretical model assumes that strategies are more prevalent in the outer circles while tactics increase in the inner circles.

II. 4. Theoretical Issues Related to the Characterization of Strategies and Tactics

Other theoretical issues arise in the development of strategies and tactics. Some of these theoretical issues influence different stages of the research process. The designers of the *superbloques* based their ideas on the examination of innovative examples developed by modern architects that in turn reflected ideas such as the communal house developed by Charles Fourier in reaction to the Industrial Revolution. The experience of *superbloques* is also linked to the 20th century evolution of the rise and decline of policies of production of affordable mass-housing in the western world.

II. 4. a. Social Engineering and Architecture: Evolution of the Communal Housing

Following the path of well-known precedents spanning from the nineteenth century, *superbloques* are attempts at social engineering by structures of power using a specific building type. The ultimate goal of Venezuela's dictatorship in the 1950s was to provide a platform to promote the integration of low-income communities into an idealized modernity (Lopez, 1986). This is not the first attempt to use policymaking and architecture as a means of social engineering. Since the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the search for solutions to mass housing included the idea of communal living.

The evolution of the communal housing is closely related to the evolution of social paradigms that developed after the growth of the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s (Benevolo, 1967). The end of the walled city and the technological revolution in the means of production stimulated debate about the future of society and its habitat. According to Leonardo Benevolo, Charles Fourier set the foundation for the discussion

of communal living by featuring it in his utopian project for an autonomous community: the *falange*.

Fourier developed the *Phalanstère* as a solution for what he defined as the seventh stage of human development, a period when universal harmony is achieved (Benevolo, 1967). This universal harmony would be accomplished once society embraced a functional collective way to organize society in self-sufficient units of 1,620 inhabitants to survive the chaos in the administration of scarce resources. The *Phalanstère* was the architectural solution to house the *falange*; it is an autonomous unit detached from the city, a post-urban artifact that contains all the functional and institutional structures to support the inhabitants including the means of production. Fourier's vision gained followers that sympathized with the proposed model of social organization. Among them was Jean-Baptiste Godin, who built the first successful *Phalanstère* at Guise between 1859 and 1877. Godin's critique of the *Phalanstère* of Guise, helped set up the conceptual framework that later supported Le Corbusier's quest to develop the *Unité* (Ibid.).

Fourier's communal building is an historic precedent for two other projects, one developed by Moisei Ginzburg (1928) in Moscow and the other by Le Corbusier (1948) in Marseille and other locations in France and Germany. Ginzburg developed the *Narkomfin* building in Moscow to implement the ideas he delineated in his manifesto *Style and Epoch*, particularly the notion that building styles are forged according to the needs and circumstances of a particular period. The *Narkomfin* building embodied the Socialist ideal of *living space* that encouraged an economy of scarce resources and an ethic and practice of cooperation, making possible a new mode of existence called

communal living or *Dom Kommuna* (Kotkin, 1995). According to this model, for any individual in society there is a certain amount of *living space* determined by scientific norms of health and hygiene that should be provided by the state. The approach suggests that a greater number of people could be housed in less space and, furthermore, with more communal facilities. Ginzburg's project followed Fourier's model in terms of the duality of housing/communal services in the building, but differs significantly in ideological terms. Fourier envisioned an autonomous community not attached to any larger system. In contrast, Ginzburg's *Narkomfin* is a fragment connected to the larger system of state-promoted socialism. There are also differences in control.

Le Corbusier built upon the experience of *Dom Kommuna* in his design for the *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille (1948-1952). He was familiar with the Soviet model as he experienced it first-hand in his visits to the USSR starting in 1928 through the early 1930s. He attempted to replicate it in his first significant commission, the *Cité Refuge* (1933) in Paris. The subsequent urgent need for affordable housing in the post-World-War-II period and Le Corbusier's prestige as leader of the modern movement, granted him the commission to complete this housing experiment with no interference from local authorities (Le, 1953). Le Corbusier emphasized that the *Unités* were intended to be a paradigmatic building type, meant to reconcile the expansion of the built environment in harmony with nature as the move from horizontal to vertical development would preserve more green natural areas. Le Corbusier's plan overlaps with Fourier in the autonomy of the building and the housing/communal-space duality, but like Ginzburg he did not pursue the project for a self-sufficient community, since he

did not consider the need for a "means of production" inside the building. Rather, he provided communal areas, day-care facilities, and recreational facilities on the roof with some commercial areas dispersed throughout the structure. Compared to the austere, functional approach of Ginzburg, Le Corbusier added more areas, more housing units and an expressive approach with a more elaborated massing and architectural details. Rather than emphasizing the ideal of communal living, Le Corbusier emphasized the typological and technical characteristics of the *Unités* to promote it as an emblematic replicable piece of modern architecture.

While Fourier envisioned the *Phalanstère* as manifesting a utopian order in society that balanced individual and collective needs (Benevolo, 1967), Ginzburg aimed to deliver a solution to forces that were already in place in the Soviet Union (Ginzburg, 1982) . Le Corbusier, for his part, recovered the utopians' implications of the ideal of communal living as a way to improve the multistory residential type he proposed (Le, 1953). There are also differences in terms of architectural features. Fourier used enclosed patios to create communal spaces and all cooking and eating facilities were communal. Le Corbusier and Ginzburg used the free standing blocks but located communal facilities in different ways. The Swiss architect located these facilities inside the block and on its roof while bridges connected the Soviet residential wings to the support services.

II. 4. b. Superbloques and the Framework of Modern Architecture

Superbloques were developed amidst the boom of modern architecture in the middle of the 20th century and were shaped according to the ideology of the avant-garde. Architects practicing between 1910 and 1930 such as Adolf Loos and Le

Corbusier shaped the ideas that defined the avant-garde movement by rupturing the limits of tradition and classicism imposed on the architectural discipline. Loos argues in his "Die Baumaterialien (The Construction Materials) (1898), "Das Prinzip der Bekleidung" (The Veneer Principle) (1898), and "Arkitektur" (Architecture) (1910), that architecture should be redefined by new construction techniques and by the appropriate use of materials. For his part, Le Corbusier, in his early manifesto *Towards an Architecture* (2007) advocates that architecture should embrace other disciplines, specifically engineering, because they were shaped by technological advances. The resurgence of other movements such as *De Stijl* in the Netherlands, Futurism (Umberto Sant'Elia), and Rationalism (Guiseppe Terragni) in Italy contributed to this discussion (Frampton, 2007). Later, the *Bauhaus* (1919-1933) a German school of applied arts, reinforced the relationship between architecture and art by connecting avant-garde ideas from these two fields. Another school of applied arts, the *Vukhtemas* (1920-1930) in the Soviet Union (USSR) also, combined the fine and applied arts and supported the brief apogee of constructivist architecture in the USSR (Cooke, 1985). Its main theorist and practitioner was Moisei Ginzburg, who wrote the manifesto *Style and Epoch* (1923) that also reinforces the ties between architecture and engineering by suggesting methods to develop a scientific approach to the design process. In these earlier works avant-garde theorists prepared the scenario for innovative projects and breakthrough experiments, in which multifamily housing became a central actor.

In *Modernity and Housing*, Peter Rowe (1993) asserts that technology determines the modern philosophy through three elements that also sustain the technical orientation of the entire society: "a technological way to do things, a

technocratic way to manage things, and a technical way of interpreting people and their world” (p. 5). Influenced by these forces, architecture and housing in particular, were conceived as part of an industrial process in which all elements involved were quantified and the dweller was conceived of as an abstract entity. Rowe describes the case of modern housing as a particular episode of the avant-garde movement. According to Rowe, in the evolution of modern housing two historical moments are particularly relevant in the definition of ideals. The first is the interwar period, defined by a construction boom in which avant-garde architects had a relevant role and established the outline of future projects based on modern ideology; the second is the decade between 1970 and 1980, in which postmodern criticism pushed for an evolution of housing ideals put in place in the previous decades. According to Rowe, the critique in this second period intensified as modern housing complexes such as the iconic Pruitt Igoe in Saint Louis collapsed in 1972. Clare Cooper Marcus and Wendy Sarkissian’s book *Housing as if People Mattered* (1987) is an example of this postmodern critique aimed at the inclusion of social aspects to inform the design process. The design guidelines proposed by Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian are supported by a critical approach to avant-garde ideals on housing. By pointing out specific flaws in modern housing projects, the authors argue that the most frequent problems originate from the disconnection between designers and potential dwellers during the design process.

Other authors such as John Turner (1976) also point to the alienation of designers and policy-makers from dwellers as the main cause of failure in low-income housing projects. Turner uses *superbloques* to explain one of his major arguments: “The life of dwelling structures has more to do with human institutions than building

technologies” (p.47). According to Turner, buildings such as the *superbloques* require intensive policies of maintenance and community organization to improve living conditions effectively. Witold Rybczynski (1993) reflects on the failure of the modern housing developed in the U.S. by citing Catherine’s Bauer claim that the life in these high-rise buildings is in no way related to the expectations of the American family (p. 83). According to Rybczynski, the austere language of modern architecture displayed in projects such as Cabrini-Green fit into the financial expectations of the promoters but were unsuitable for low-income American families.

II. 4. c. Monumentality and Reductionism

In addition to the alienation of potential residents during the design process, I define two other aspects that hindered the development of the high-rise high-density as an alternative for modern housing:

1) **The quest for monumentality** is a relevant characteristic in the examination of *superbloques* and is also present in other examples. When analyzing the role of all projects developed by the Venezuelan dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, Azier Calvo defines two main driving forces: monumentality and the sense of permanence of the built form. These ideals were defined more by size than by style (Calvo, 1996). According to Calvo, during the dictatorship both the government and private sectors emphasized the monumental-scale and appearance of the projects over functionality, giving more predominance to the idea of the building as an isolated entity rather than as a generator of urban space (Ibid, 1996). The dictatorship's quest for monumentality over more financial or practical considerations echoes the driving force behind other emblematic modern housing projects throughout the world. The Pruitt-Igoe complex

built in St. Louis, Missouri, in the 1950s composed of 33 eleven-story buildings housing almost 3000 residents, was also driven by promoters who believed in the high-rise as an icon of progress. According to Alexander Von Hoffman (2000), the reasoning behind the construction of Pruitt-Igoe usually follows three theories: 1) the influence of Le Corbusier⁷ in the design of the architect Minoru Yamazaki. 2) The need to segregate the black population in the inner city, and 3) the cost restrictions set by the Federal Government. (p. 181) Von Hoffman recognizes these influences, but in the specific case of Pruitt-Igoe, he considers that its inception was driven by the will of Saint Louis Mayor Joseph Darst, who wanted a major high-rise urban development project because he admired the skyscrapers of Manhattan. The promoters of Pruitt-Igoe argued that “building such shiny monumental structures would reverse suburban migration and solve social problems of the poor” (p.183). In both Caracas and St Louis, the political leaders who brought these buildings to the landscape did not necessarily base their decisions on achieving the best urban, architectural, technical, or social solutions. Rather, they valued the physical dimensions as a representation of their ambition to achieve the ideal of progress and thus to change the landscape and social dynamics for the better.

2) **The Failure to Reinterpret Le Corbusier’s *Unité Adequately*.** William Curtis (1982) points out the lack of complexity in the interpretations of Le Corbusier's original model of the *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille as the source of the failure of the high rise as a popular housing type. According to Curtis, “minimum functional definitions [in the design of high rises] were allowed to prevail over the rich elaboration of new communal

⁷ Witold Rybczynski (1993), however, places the blame in the influence of Mies Van der Rohe because his architecture was simple and austere, and also because he was more relevant in America compared to Le Corbusier.

images in touch with basic human needs” (p.293). Curtis argues that Le Corbusier provided a complex model in the *Unité* that required all its parts in order to succeed. The over-simplification of the original by their imitators could be one of the reasons behind the failure of the model. In the case of *superbloques*, this process of oversimplification is evident in the lack of amenities in later *superbloques* deployed in large numbers compared to the initial designs that were more related to Le Corbusier’s concepts of the integration of housing and communal facilities.

The source of problems in high-rise high-density buildings is related to the lack of amenities in these buildings and developments as designers ignored the necessary relationship between residential and communal spaces in the building layouts. This assumption does not ignore other facts that impacted the quality of life of residents, such as the concentration of low-income residents and the challenges presented in the maintenance of such large structures. In another context, a recent study by Fares El-Dahdah (2005) demonstrates how people living in Brazil’s capital Brasilia found their modern housing located in the *superquadras* (another form of modern mass housing) to be suitable to their needs. El-Dahdah suggest that the once criticized modern housing in Brasilia is a viable housing solution as middle-class families embraced the life-style proposed by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niememyer. Florian Urban (2012) contributed to this vision by describing the process of architectural comeback of the Brazilian *superquadras* as a result of the change of the social dynamics in the city’s real estate market that is bringing the wealthy to the modern housing where a lifestyle based on the use of the car matches the aspiration of the original planners. This substantiates the need to review the experience with modern housing, including Caracas’ *superbloques*.

II. 4. d. Flexible housing

In examining the evolution of life in *superbloques*, I found that the flexibility in their original layouts facilitated user-defined changes. When it comes to housing, flexibility can add value to the architectural solution. Tatiana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2007) broadly define flexible housing as one “that can adjust to changing needs both social and technological” (p. 4). Expanding further on the definition of flexible housing, Schneider and Till identify the distinction between *adaptability* and *flexibility*. Adaptability is related to program changes and flexibility is associated with physical changes in the original layout (Ibid, 2007). The issue of flexibility and adaptability might have impacted the development of tactics by residents in the process of appropriating their space.

The lack of flexibility and the reduction of user options for personalization are considered a pervasive problem related to the design of affordable housing. In *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing*, N. John Habraken (1972) describes the problems of monotony and repetition that arise with working-class housing, which diminishes the experience for residents. Habraken criticizes mass housing for imposing methods that put the residents outside the decision-making process. To contrast these methods, Habraken proposes considering each residence as an autonomous entity and the building itself as a support system that hold houses in the same way “bookcases hold books” (p. 59). In this way, the user can have direct control over his/her house while promoters such as the State can have control over the production of supports. While no examples exist that support this proposed method, Habraken later suggested the idea of an “open-building” a framework that would allow the modification of its different systems depending on users who would define their needs by participating in

the design process. Both concepts by Habraken show possible alternatives to mass housing that can be related to the high-rise typology. Habraken's alternatives focus on the technology applied to affordable housing rather than on the building type.

III. Chapter Three: Historical Background

In this chapter, I describe the historic background of *superbloques* using two timelines. Firstly, the history of events in the social and political field that occurred in Venezuela between 1945 and 1958 that marked the rise and fall of the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Secondly, I refer to the history of the development of the *superbloques* including their raise and eventual stagnation. This chapter discusses the *superbloque* as an imported landmark of modernity used as a government tool to reinforce its agenda of modernization and the problems that arise during their implementation.

III. 1. Venezuela Historical Forces: Wealth, the State and the People

Superbloques were conceived during the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, amidst a process of modernization fueled by increased oil revenues and economic stability. This combination of increased State wealth with a modernization project occurred several times in Venezuela's contemporary history as a result of the shift from a mainly agrarian to an oil-based economy after the second decade of the 20th century. Crude oil is the main force behind the economy in Venezuela, and its price fluctuations have determined the relationship between the citizens and the State. In *The Magical State*, Fernando Coronil (1997) defines the contemporary Venezuelan State as a mediator between the country's two constituencies: the citizens and those who control the wealth produced by its rich subsoil.

Typically, the Venezuelan state astonishes through the marvel of power rather than convinces through the power of reason, as reason itself is made part of the awe-inspiring spectacle of its rule. By manufacturing dazzling development projects that engender collective fantasies of

progress, it casts its spell over audience and performers alike. As a “magnanimous sorcerer”, the state seizes its subjects by inducing a condition or state of being receptive to its illusions –a magical state (p. 5).

Before oil was discovered in Venezuela, it was very difficult for any government to take effective control of the nation as its power was always contested by other internal forces. For almost 100 years after Venezuela obtained its independence from the Spanish empire in the late 1820s, political instability and civil and military conflicts defined the history of the country. According to Coronil (1997), it was not until Venezuela became a “petrostate” in the 20th century that the State was able to display and implement its power effectively over society, thus ending its persistent inability to enforce its rule among its citizens (Ibid). Once the oil business afforded abundant financial resources, it was possible for the State, as embodied in the government, to establish authority over the nation’s unstable social forces through the monopoly control over the country's wealth, therefore, reinforcing other repressive tools such as the military. Over the years, the dynamics in which the State has implemented its authority created and reinforced the idea of it as a powerful entity, capable of satisfying the needs of citizens, or at least selling the illusion of it. According to Coronil, either through an authoritarian or democratic government, when the State mediated between itself and the people, the rich natural resources constituted a "unifying force by producing fantasies of collective integration into centralized political institutions” (p.4). In this order of things, the challenge for the State was to demonstrate its force through overarching policies impacting the life of Venezuelans.

These illusions of collective integration have been repeated several times in contemporary Venezuelan history. Coronil (1997) argues that these fantasies are

produced in times of increased flow of resources usually as a consequence of increases in the price of oil. By 1997 and citing author Jose Ignacio Cabrujas, Coronil defines three specific periods in which the *fantasy* was set on stage in order to search for the “Venezuelan dream” (Table III.1). The first is the dictatorship led by Juan Vicente Gomez between 1908 and 1935, when the oil industry was created and developed through concessions to international corporations. The second is the dictatorship period of both the “*junta de gobierno*” (government coalition) between 1948 and 1952 and the government of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952-1958) and his “*Nuevo Ideal Nacional*” (New national Ideal) plan. The third is the first administration of Carlos Andres Pérez between 1974 and 1979 and his “*La Gran Venezuela*” plan. These three periods offered an intense quest for progress on one hand, while the increase in oil revenues created certain distortions in the local economy such as the overvaluation of the domestic currency, the promotion of imports, and the undermining of the local productive sector on the other. This set of symptoms known by economist as the “Dutch disease” (Coronil 1997) created a difficult situation for those governments in charge of handling the aftermath of these economic booms. The inception and development of *superbloques* occurred amidst a project of modernization during the second of these three periods.

Table III.1. Three Critical Periods in Contemporary Venezuelan History José Ignacio Cabrujas (cited by Coronil 1997)		
“Premiere”	“Debut”	“Revival”
Juan Vicente Gómez dictatorship (1908-1935) Oil business is developed	Marcos Pérez Jiménez’ Dictatorship(1948-1958) National Plan: “El Nuevo Ideal Nacional” Public Works	Carlos Andrés Pérez’ first administration (1974-1979) National Plan: “La Gran Venezuela” Technology investment

III. 2. Superbloques' Historical Context: "Debut"

The inception of *superbloques* occurred during the second of the three periods defined by Coronil, in the ten-year dictatorship of the *Junta de Gobierno* (government council) and Marcos Pérez Jiménez' government between 1948 and 1958. This ten-year period was preceded by several attempts to establish democracy in Venezuela after the death of Juan Vicente Gómez in 1935, who ruled the country for 27 years. The *Junta de Gobierno* took power in November 1948 after a coup d'état carried out by the armed forces against Romulo Gallegos who was democratically elected just nine months earlier by a civil coalition led by his party *Acción Democrática* (AD). Gallegos' government was preceded by another government coalition between 1945 and 1948 constituted by civil and military officials led by Romulo Betancourt, which in turn had overthrown the government of Isaias Medina Angarita in 1945. The coup d'état against Medina Angarita was organized between the social forces of AD and young military officers including Carlos Delgado Chalbaud, Marcos Pérez Jiménez, and Luis Felipe Llovera Páez. This historically unique coexistence of military and civil forces in Venezuelan history was broken after the general elections of 1948, as soon as military officers realized that the new government would eventually undermine their power and influence (Kolb, 1974). Chalbaud and the other military leaders justified the 1948 coup based on the need to confront the national crisis and to maintain control over the extremist forces supposedly represented by AD. This political party was banned, Betancourt went to exile to Costa Rica in 1948, and other leaders were either imprisoned or went underground (Coronil 1997, Kolb, 1974).

The alternation of military and democratically elected governments between 1935 and 1948 emphasizes the struggle between the civilian and military sectors to grasp the power of the state, and increased as a result of cash influx provided by oil corporations. The continuous struggle between the military and civilian forces for power determined Venezuela's historical evolution since its independence in 1824 after a bloody war against Spain. The events between 1945 and 1958 were another episode in this struggle and preceded forty years of democratically elected governments until 1998 when another military leader, Hugo Chávez was elected president.

The *Junta de Gobierno* (initially directed by Carlos Delgado Chalbaud, who was Betancourt's and Gallego's former Minister of Defense and the most influential leader within the armed forces) defined itself as a transitional government that was moving towards the organization of general elections, addressing political forces inside and outside Venezuela that fought for a return of the constitutional order. Chalbaud's tenure ended in a controversial assassination in November 1950 without legitimizing elections. The plot behind his assassination was never clarified but as a result of it, Pérez Jiménez gained more power and eventually took full control of the government on December 2, 1952, even though he lost the elections on November 30, 1952, to a coalition of civilian organizations led by Jóvito Villalba. Pérez Jiménez used his influence in the armed forces to alter the results and crush Villalba's aspirations.

Pérez Jiménez was able to consolidate power not only because of his control of the armed forces but also because of the support he received from the U.S. Department of State that heavily influenced the Organization of American States (OAS) at that time (Kolb, 1974). Ignoring any critique to his legitimacy, Pérez Jiménez stayed in power until

the next elections in late 1957. During his government, the opposition forces went underground and were heavily repressed along with labor organizations and the free press under the doctrine of national security. An economic boon in Venezuela marked the outset of his presidency and helped him to gain legitimacy through great public works rather than through promoting democratic institutions (Blanco, 1983). However, according to Glenn Kolb (1974), the 1953 economic boom was the result of unsustainable forces and had no positive impact on the country as a whole as investment was focused on the central region and Caracas, thus drawing more rural migrants to the city and undermining the goals of the slum clearance program:

Venezuela was, indeed, in the midst of a boom. But it was an economy artificially stimulated by two special processes: 1) the new wide-open season on the extraction of the country's natural resources, principally crude oil, and 2) the Pérez Jiménez building spree which, in turn, drew its revenues from the petroleum industry. The effects of the boom were not uniform throughout the country, but stimulated some sectors of the economy while depressing others. (...) Since the public works program was limited chiefly to Caracas and the *Autopista* leading to La Guaira, wages paid to laborers were spent mainly in the capital and had the effect of stimulating the economy of the metropolitan area without raising production or income in the remainder of the nation (p.131).

According to Coronil (1997), during Pérez Jiménez's rule, "the nation's social body became more marked as the passive beneficiary of its natural body, seen now as the main source of the nation's power." (p.168). As mentioned by Kolb, his Presidency was characterized by a frenzy of public works investment in infrastructure that he usually launched on December 2nd to commemorate his Inauguration Day as President. His presidency was ended by another coup d'état when he prevented the

implementation of legitimate elections in 1957, thus weakening his power base. Pérez Jiménez went into exile to the Dominican Republic in 1958 and later moved to the U.S. where authorities extradited him back to Venezuela where he was tried for embezzlement and sentenced to five years in prison. Soon after his release, he was still a popular figure and was elected to the Venezuelan Senate in 1968, but the congress passed a law specifically aimed to prevent him from serving. Unable to occupy any political position, he went into a second exile and eventually died in Madrid, Spain, in 2001 at the age of 83. His political legacy is marked by the extensive public works executed during his presidency, including the highway between Caracas and La Guaira, the modernization of the armed forces and many architectural landmarks such as the Humboldt Hotel in Caracas, the University City, the military academy, and the hundreds of *superbloques* that fueled his vision of a slum-free Caracas including the two projects that are the focus of this study: *Cerro Grande* and *23 de Enero*.

III. 3. The Housing Issue and its Solution: the Rise of the *Superbloque*

“From the new leader’s perspective, the rational use of oil money entailed transplanting onto Venezuelan soil what they saw as the visible signs and sources of modernity.”(Coronil 1997, p.167)

During the 1948-1958 dictatorship, Venezuela experienced modernization on a grand scale. Pérez Jiménez's government led the way in the pursuit of the physical transformation of cities and the creation of new infrastructure. Large demographic changes also brought many new residents to Caracas from rural areas attracted by the opportunities afforded by the building and oil industries (Table III.2). In Venezuela, the development of the oil Industry changed both the economy and the balance of power

between the urban and rural development, creating more employment in the new oil fields in the lake Maracaibo and Anzoátegui and making cities such as Caracas more attractive to local and foreign entrepreneurs. Because of this, the government invested a portion of the huge increase in oil revenues to create new infrastructure to address the challenge of fast growing cities.

Year	Population Venezuela	Population Caracas	Population Caracas Metropolitan	Caracas as % of Venezuela	Metropolitan as % of Venezuela
1812	ca. 1,000,000	ca,50,000		5.0	
1851	1,429,498	34,165		2.4	
1873	1,784,194	48,897		2.7	
1881	2,075,245	55,638		2.7	
1891	2,323,527	72,429		3.1	
1920	2,411,952	92,212		3.8	
1926	3,026,878	135,253		4.4	
1936	3,364,347	263,358		7.8	
1941	3,850,771	359,225		9.3	
1950	5,034,838	495,064	790,456	9.8	15.7
1961	7,523,999	1,116,245	1,501,289	14.8	20.0

Pérez Jiménez and his policymakers, planners, and designers faced many challenges and the most crucial being housing for the growing low and medium-income class. By the end of the 1940's, the housing shortage for low-income families put pressure on governmental agencies to act. Since promoters in the private sector were mainly focused on developing housing solutions for medium-and high-income households, the government set up agencies to design and build new housing (Cilento, 2008). Despite these efforts, the government and the private sector were unable to

provide sufficient affordable housing, which both increased the number and size of informal settlements and created an underground housing market. In many Venezuelan cities, but particularly in Caracas, informal settlers invaded areas neglected by formal planners, mainly on public lands, belts of reserved land, and on park spaces. These informal self-built rudimentary housing units using scrap material are known in the popular culture derogatorily as *ranchos*. For government planners, the *rancho* became an enemy to overcome and was portrayed in official propaganda as a negative external force rather than a natural outcome of the lack of affordable housing. For slum residents, the *rancho* became not only their basic shelter but also their main source of equity; the *rancho* evolved from a flimsy shack to concrete, brick and multistory structures. Since *ranchos* occupied the slopes of the mountains, these informal settlements or *barrios* became very visible in Caracas from their inception. By the beginning of the 1950s, they were a controversial but pervasive element of the urban landscape of Venezuela's capital city.

III. 4. The Battle Against the *Rancho*

During the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez and following the previous two administrations by Carlos Delgado Chalbaud, the government facilitated the modernization of Venezuela's infrastructure as part of an ideological framework, the *Nuevo Ideal Nacional* (New National Ideal) which sought to propel society toward moral, intellectual, and material progress through the transformation of the physical realm (Rincón, 1982). Under these guidelines, the government built many new architectural and infrastructural projects that were designed according to universal modern trends. This new infrastructure was conceived to overcome Venezuela's traditional inertia and

to promote a modern image of the country. Pérez Jiménez reinforced the idea of the State as a promoter and constructor of new housing developments by starting the *batalla contra el rancho* (battle against the rancho), a military euphemism to describe a slum clearance program which sought to provide families in informal settlements with new housing units built according to higher standards. The government's ministry of infrastructure (MOP by its Spanish initials) created the national housing plan in 1951 to propel the "battle" and also created the *Taller de Arquitectura del Banco Obrero* (TABO) to centralize all the actions of this plan. TABO was in charge of creating new architectural design solutions aligned with the ideals of the dictatorship, inviting the participation of a group of young promising Venezuelan architects under the direction of Carlos Raul Villanueva⁸ (Meza, 2011).

III. 5. Precedents of the 1951 Housing Plan

From its foundation in 1928, *Banco Obrero* had been the office in charge of the development of housing policies in Venezuela, and until 1948, was mainly focused on promoting financial tools and the development of new housing projects (López. 1994). Before 1948, the most important project developed by the *Banco Obrero* was the urban renovation of *El Silencio* in downtown Caracas. The project was the result of a closed design competition between the architects Carlos Guinand Sandoz and the winner Carlos Raul Villanueva. Villanueva's design of *El Silencio* engaged the traditional colonial urban fabric and also created innovatively designed apartments.⁹ He used covered galleries at the ground level to tie into the existing street facades in a fashion

⁸ Carlos Raul Villanueva (1900 -1976) born in London and educated as an architect in France's École des Beaux-Arts, Villanueva had a prolific work in Venezuela. He authored Caracas University City and other relevant buildings between 1930 and 1970

⁹ *El Silencio* totaled 779 apartments in 7 units with commercial facilities on the ground level and internal courtyards. An important public space, O'Leary Square was also part of the plan.

similar to the arcades in Paris' *Rue de Rivoli* or Algiers' colonial Mediterranean façade. However, the internal courtyards with their unornamented shapes resemble early European modern rationalism.

As an urban redevelopment project, *El Silencio* is still considered exemplary (Fraser, 2000; Rowe, 1993) but there is no evidence that it influenced the successive work of *Banco Obrero* or any other housing policy in Venezuela. After 1948, rather than using housing to renovate urban centers, *Banco Obrero* created new neighborhoods on undeveloped or peripheral areas of Venezuelan cities. Fewer than ten years later, after his project for *El Silencio*, Villanueva himself as lead consultant of TABO undertook housing projects championing the *superbloque*. His change of perspective on the housing issue was probably influenced by the government's desire to intensify the modernization process with monumental buildings.

Working under the pressure of bringing modern solutions to Venezuela, architects no longer respected the traditional context, nor did they integrate new buildings into urban areas but adopted the international principles of modern architecture and urbanism, particularly those expressed in CIAM's Athens Charter (López, 1986; Meza, 2011). By the end of the 1940's, the influence of Le Corbusier's urban ideology affected Caracas when Cipriano Domínguez' *Centro Simon Bolívar* (CSB) was built adjacent to Villanueva's *El Silencio*. Both projects followed the guidelines of the urban plan developed by Maurice Rotival in the early 1940's¹⁰ but,

¹⁰ Maurice Rotival was invited in 1943 to develop a master plan for Caracas. Its main feature was the development of the Avenida Bolívar in a strong east-west axis with governmental buildings on the sides. Villanueva's design respected the layout proposed by Rotival but his residential project occupied the location of a monument for Simon Bolívar that was supposed to be the visual focus of the *Avenida Bolívar*. Domínguez' plan for the CSB corrected this situation by placing two tall skyscrapers then creating a strong landmark.

compared to Villanueva's design that respected its context, Dominguez's proposal for the CSB erased the colonial grid thus interrupting the north-south corridors, razed historic buildings (*Hotel Majestic*), and permanently disfigured others (*Teatro Municipal*). Nonetheless, the official propaganda celebrated the CSB as the most visible milestone of Venezuela's attempt to join the globalized trend of modernization.

III. 6. *Superbloque* and Utopia

From the utopianism of TABO's project to the narratives embedded in the social mobilization of Caracas' *superbloque* complexes, *23 de Enero*, the history of *superbloques*, has three major episodes: their inception, their stagnation, and their current vindication/revitalization as symbols of social determinism. These three stages are defined by Viviana D'Auria (2013) in her assessment of the *superbloque* experience:

From harbingers of modernity to symbols of oppression and icons of resistance, projections of the *superbloques* have yet to strike a balance between social reformism's utopian vigor, radical community-driven initiatives, and romanticized contestation (p. 131).

To implement the national housing plan of 1951, the newly created TABO under Villanueva's direction worked under a framework based on three ideals: innovation, technological development, and central planning. A group of talented architects influenced by globalized trends provided the innovation. Advances in building technology were possible because of the expansion of the concrete industry and a strong oil-driven economy that allowed private contractors to import the most innovative machinery and know-how available. Central planning created homogenous results and

standardized housing solutions regardless of the site. These three ideals neglected any preservation of the existing traditional fabric or building types.

Using TABO as a platform, Venezuelan architects and planners developed new solutions using the high-density high-rise housing type conceived by Le Corbusier in his ongoing project for high-rise, multi-family housing in Marseille: the *unité d'habitation* and also based on the C.I.A.M. Athen's Charter (1933) principles. The oversized building, then an experimental typology for housing, proved to fit perfectly with the Venezuelan dictatorship's policies and political agenda of monumentality. As previously designs by *Banco Obrero* for multistory housing used the term *bloque* (block) these new design were known as *superbloques* (superblocks).

The first three *superbloques* planned between 1951 and 1953, *Cerro Grande*, *El Paraíso*, and the unrealized *Quinta Crespo* marked a promising beginning for the *superbloque* as they included communal services and a more elaborated architectural design. When mass production became the driving force in the second stage of the National Housing Plan *Cerro Piloto* in 1954, the free standing *superbloque* was set aside in favor of neighborhoods of multiple buildings such as the emblematic *2 de Diciembre* (later renamed *23 de Enero*). The low-cost *superbloque* model *Diego de Losada* deployed in these neighborhoods eliminated the mixed-use in-building layout and some amenities in the façades and left only apartments and circulation spaces. These simplified models were built in great numbers allowing the government to achieve and even surpass the total-housing-units-built goals. By the end of 1958, a total of 97 *superbloques* had been built with 17,934 apartments housing approximately 160,000 people (*Banco Obrero, 1959*). Ironically, the population of Caracas also

increased during this period by rural workers drawn to the capital by the potential employment in the construction of this housing, thereby exacerbating the housing problem.

In spite of the government's initial objective to reinforce its agenda, *superbloques* ultimately contributed to ending Marcos Pérez Jiménez' dictatorship. The concentration of low-income working class people in these buildings created the conditions for the development of social organizations that contested the authority of the dictatorship. According to Manuel López (1994), these housing complexes were the battleground on which the ideology of the dictatorship collided with the expectations of the people, thus creating social forces that eventually supported the transition to democracy in 1958. Carlos Brando, one of the architects in charge of the design of these buildings, also anticipated this situation.

What we did in the TABO was transcendental. It was not pro-government propaganda; it was an action to empower people. When M. Casanova asked me what political consequences might follow from this policy that put together too many people in one place, I immediately told him: the end of the dictatorship." (Cepero, Bermudez, Brando, Mijares, 1996. p.73)

Although welcomed at first, *superbloques* became stigmatized in the following democratic period because of their symbolic relationship to the dictatorship and its authoritarian policies and the failure of low-income *superbloque* developments to provide a positive environment for their inhabitants (Carlson, 1960). Furthermore, they utterly failed in their main objective: to clear the slums and house citizens in modern housing.

III. 7. *Superbloque* Critique and Stagnation

The military and civil turmoil that returned the country to democracy in 1958 represented the beginning of the *superbloques*' stagnation. As symbols of the dictatorship, they were heavily criticized by the new authorities (Lopez, 1994). A multi-lateral commission led by Eric Carlson performed a post-occupancy evaluation, the CINVA report, in 1959, (Banco Obrero 1959, Carlson 1960) that highlighted the social conflicts in communities where more than two thirds of the population came from rural areas outside Caracas (Ibid.). As the dictatorial regime's order collapsed, unfinished apartments, hillsides, and open spaces around *superbloques* became occupied by informal settlements that created intertwined systems of both formal and informal housing. In the early 1980s, the government transferred homeownership to the residents of *superbloques* and integrated them into the private housing market and gave them control over the infrastructure. Since 1954, users have renovated their apartments and the public areas to address their needs. Government assistance is needed to support the complex process of preservation of the aging structures, and to make the role of the communities in the decision making process more relevant.

According to Coronil (1997) Marcos Pérez Jiménez project was greatly based on the importation of "icons of progress" such as the *superbloques*. Conceived as part of the utopian project of the *Nuevo Ideal Nacional*, *superbloques* were the local interpretation of a universal modern project that sought to change the social order by redefining the elements of the city. In his 1989 critique of Brasilia, James Holston argues that architects supported these redefinitions by developing "a set of equally revolutionary building types and urban structures" believing "that the creation of new

forms of formal experiences would transform society” (p.52). *Superbloques* certainly acted as agents of social change but not in the direction that the regime’s ideology predicted as they were conceived without any consideration of the target population (Kolb, 1974; Meza, 2011; Carlson, 1960) which inevitably generated alienation in the end-user communities.

III. 8. The 1959 Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE) by CINVA

Overwhelmed by the challenge of maintaining the *superbloques* inherited from the dictatorship, the *Banco Obrero* authorities commissioned a study to rationalize the decision-making process about the future of these buildings and the implementation of future housing policies. At the end of the dictatorship, *superbloques* came under the control of *Banco Obrero*’s new authorities, including the designers that were involved in the initial projects (Meza, 2011). The criticism focused on the efficiency and not on its typology as an affordable housing solution. A variety of problems had become evident in large communities such as *2 de Diciembre/ 23 de Enero* and were difficult to resolve. To address this problem, *Banco Obrero* commissioned a post-occupancy evaluation (POE) of the *Centro Interamericano de Vivienda y Planeamiento* or CINVA (Inter-American Housing and Planning Center), a multilateral institution based in Bogotá, Colombia. The director of this institution and the lead investigator was the American planner Eric Carlson. Starting in January 1959, the group assessed the project and delivered its final report in April 1959 published as *Proyecto de evaluación de los superbloques del Banco Obrero* (Evaluation Project of *Banco Obrero*’s *superbloques*). The CINVA report is still the only large-scale investigation evaluating *superbloques* that is focused on both the physical and social aspects.

When describing the purpose of the study, Carlson (1960) mentions the need for the Venezuelan people to know the relationship between the impact of the *superbloque* policy and the housing shortages in relation to the rural to urban displacement. Carlson (1960) outlined three main objectives for this study:

1) To establish criteria for future policy with regard to the construction of superbloques. 2) To recommend to the *Banco Obrero* immediate steps for improving living conditions in the superbloques¹¹ and for the conservation of the investments that have been made in this type of construction. 3) To recommend to the *Banco Obrero* and other authorities concerned, long-term steps for the management of the superbloques and the integration of their inhabitants with the community through educational and social programs (p. 190).

The study is delivered with a letter signed by Carlson stating that although the study is commissioned by *Banco Obrero*, it is performed with no bias (Banco Obrero; Bogotá Inter-American Housing and Planning Center, 1959). This is a significant statement, because of the new government's agenda, which was aimed at the disqualification of the legacy that the dictatorship had built. Beatriz Meza provides an examination of this issue in her research about *superbloques* (2011), concluding that the report is biased given its focus on the negative aspects of the policy based on often shallow descriptions of issues (Meza, 2011). In the early stages of this report (Banco Obrero; Bogotá Inter-American Housing and Planning Center, 1959) *superbloques* are described using negative connotations based on subjective observations:

These multifamily buildings painted in startling colors stand up in twelve locations of Caracas' metropolitan area. They constitute symbols of an

¹¹ Carlson uses the English translation of *superbloques* in his report.

era, of a pretended solution to the housing problem and of a major proportion vertical overcrowding” (p.47)

The continuous overlap between the building and its historical circumstances is visible in the narrative of the CINVA’s report. According to Meza (2011) the report often mixes statistics with subjective descriptions that emphasize the political implications of the policy, failing to acknowledge basic facts such as the slum-clearance objective of the original policy (p.158). The study acknowledges positive aspects in the apartment design but overall contributed to the stagnation of the *superbloques* by focusing on the negative aspects in the most critical cases where low-income dwellers were concentrated. According to Viviana D’Auria (2013) the CINVA report became a source of many other studies that prevented future housing initiatives in the region: “the immediacy of CINVA's critique, largely intermingled with a broader attack on Pérez Jiménez's dictatorship, shattered the voluntarism of solving mass housing problems through an inclusive, instant state welfare” (p.131). The main characteristics, findings, and recommendations of the CINVA report are listed in Table III.3.

Table III.3 CINVA Post Occupancy Evaluation (Carlson, 1960)		
Methodology	Methods and sampling	Findings and recommendations
Field observations Ethnography In-depth Interviews Surveys	<p>(a) Survey of Housing and Living Conditions in three widely different <i>superbloque</i> projects, totaling 90 apartments.</p> <p>(b) Complete census of all 150 families in one entire building, picked at random.</p> <p>(c) Sample economic survey of 77 families chosen at random in three different <i>superbloque</i> projects.</p> <p>(d) Sample nutrition survey of 172 families distributed in six different projects.</p> <p>(e) A series of biographical studies, based on in-depth interviews describing living conditions.</p> <p>(J) Comparison of population characteristics and living conditions between a 'good' project, 'Simon Rodriguez', and the 'worst' project, '23 de Enero'.</p> <p>(g) Comparison of conditions and attitudes of 146 families in one of the areas of ranchos or slums of Caracas with results of the census of one entire superblock building.</p>	<p>Technical aspects Design issues in the structural layout Compliance with existing codes Monotony of elements Lack of human scale in open spaces Difficulties in the application of effective maintenance practices Lack of furnishings inside the apartments</p> <p>Social Aspects 158,700 inhabitants 2/3 of residents come from rural areas outside Caracas Overcrowding (7.7 residents per apartment in 23 de Enero) Lack of communal facilities</p> <p>Administrative aspects The study lists many organizational issues in <i>Banco Obrero</i>. The inability to effectively collect the rent from tenants.</p> <p>Recommendations Stop the construction of <i>superbloques</i> Introduce elements of human scale in existing complexes Develop a coherent housing plan involving the private sector De-centralization of the housing authority Developing a set of policies to improve financial opportunities for potential residents</p>

IV. Chapter Four: Case Studies: Description and Analysis

In this chapter, I analyze the evolution of the *superbloque's* physical layout with emphasis in its formal and spatial features. First, I explain the evolution of the *superbloque* design by analyzing the “reductionist process” (López, 1986) over the development of the eight planned models. Then, I describe and analyze the physical characteristics of the two buildings selected as case studies, emphasizing the similarities and differences of the formal, spatial, and building systems aspects. The chapter defines the original conditions of the physical layout of the *superbloques* before they were inhabited.

IV. 1. Design Evolution of Superbloques

According to Meza (2008) as a building type, all *superbloques* share some general characteristics such as the multi-story layout with 12 to 18 stories and lengths that span from 80 to 160 meters (260 to 400 feet). Beyond that, there are considerable variations among them. After studying the evolution of *superbloques* (Meza, 2008, 2009, 2011; Lopez, 1986), I organized the different *superbloque* models into five phases between 1952 and 1956.

IV. 1. a. First Wave: the Foundational Triade

The first wave includes the three single-building models that were designed according to the initial ambitions of Villanueva and his team in TABO: *Cerro Grande*, *El Paraíso* and the unrealized *Quinta Crespo*. Le Corbusier and Moisei Ginzburg and probably other contemporary examples such as Affonso Reidy's project *Pedregulho* a housing complex in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, influenced the designs of the first *superbloques*. These three buildings used concrete frame for the structural system and

incorporated amenities within each structure and included the option of two-story-apartments. *Cerro Grande* (14 stories, 144 apartments 3-4 bedrooms), and *Quinta Crespo* (12 stories, 118 apartments, 1-3 bedrooms) were proposed as single building developments; *El Paraíso* (18 stories, 182 apartments, 3 bedrooms) was planned as part of a larger complex that had not yet been built. *Quinta Crespo and El Paraíso* are designs authored by Carlos Raúl Villanueva and Carlos Celis Cepero. Celis Cepero was a Colombian architect and former assistant to Le Corbusier's in his Paris studio. The young architect Guido Bermúdez under supervision of Villanueva was in charge of *Cerro Grande*. *Quinta Crespo* was not constructed because it conflicts municipal codes that had established the site for commercial and industrial use rather than for housing (Meza, 2008). This first wave represented a transition between the values of the typology defined by Le Corbusier in Marseille (that included communal facilities within the building) and the later simplified models that did not.

IV. 1. b. Second Wave: the Multicellular Cerro Piloto and Diego de Losada

The second wave simplified the architectural features, eliminated communal programs, and championed standardization. The designs in this second phase were marked by the goals of the *Plan Cerro Piloto*, a second phase of the National Housing Plan implemented by *Banco Obrero* to increase the construction of affordable housing for re-housing residents of *barrios*. According to census data, 20,953 ranchos were located in Caracas, and housed 25% of the total population in 1949.¹² The government understood that these sectors were not properly addressed by the 1951 plan (Meza, 2009) so it decided to change the objectives to increase the stock of affordable housing

¹² Official data shows 7,776 ranchos in 1941 and 53,616 in 1953 (Meza, 2009). The increase between the 20,953 ranchos in 1949 to the 53,616 just four years later demonstrates the failure of the National Housing Plan and the Cerro Piloto plan to stop the grow of the informal settlements in Caracas.

by building *superbloques* at a large scale. The first wave of *superbloques* was targeted to middle-income families but the subsequent designs needed to address low-income residents, thereby, increasing the pressure to maximize resources. TABO was restructured and absorbed by the project office at the Ministry of Public Works (MOP), but kept Carlos Raúl Villanueva as its main consultant (Ibid.). The *Plan Cerro Piloto* focused on the construction of *superbloque* complexes in several districts in Caracas' western section, where *barrios* were expanding more rapidly on public lands. These complexes combined large *superbloques* with four-story residential units.

Guido Bermudez' Multicelular CP

The first of the complexes utilized the *superbloque multicelular* (multicellular) *Cerro Piloto* (CP) developed by Guido Bermudez, based on the requirements described in a social study developed as part of the *Cerro Piloto* plan to assess the existing conditions of *barrio* residents. The design by Guido Bermúdez developed a structural design very similar to *Cerro Grande's*, with a central bay and two cantilevers. Each *superbloque* was the result of the alignment of three modular sections, two of them with exterior staircases and a central module with elevators and staircases. The building houses eight different types of apartments, from one-to-four bedrooms in 15-story buildings with corridors every three levels, to address multiple household structures. *Banco Obrero* built forty of these building in various complexes located in western Caracas¹³ totaling 6,321 apartments (Meza, 2009).

Carlos Brando's Diego de Losada

¹³ Seven complexes used the multicelular CP designed by Bermúdez: *Altos de Cutira, Lomas de Urdaneta, Lomas de Propatria, Atlántico, La Vega, Artigas, and Cotiza* (Meza, 2009)

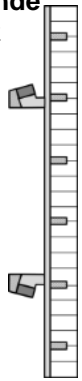
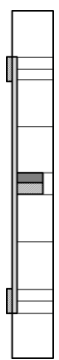
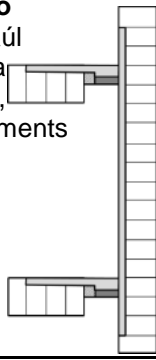

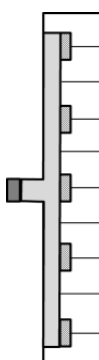
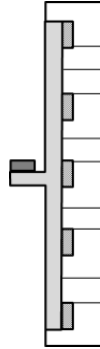
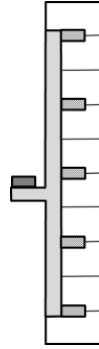
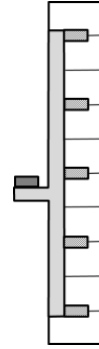
In addition to the *Multicelular CP*, the second wave of *superbloques* utilizes a different building model: *Diego de Losada* (DL) constructed, in 1955, in a large sector relatively close to Caracas's downtown, in the second phase of the *Cerro Piloto* plan that was populated by several informal settlements.¹⁴ The government planned the most massive *superbloque* complex in this area: *2 de Diciembre* (renamed *23 de Enero* after 1958). Carlos Raul Villanueva, Jose Hoffman and Jose Manuel Mijares designed *2 de Diciembre* in three phases, each one corresponding to a large *Unidad Vecinal* (Neighborhood Unit) with *superbloques*, four-storied blocks and community services (Meza, 2009). The first phase broke ground in 1955 and opened the same year. Phase one utilized the first modification of the DL block designed by Carlos Brando in 1953 defining the third wave of *superbloques*.

The design and construction of the third, fourth, and fifth waves of *superbloques* are based on the original 1953 *Diego de Losada* plans. Although these models use the same structural frame with three bays in their transverse sections and lack the cantilevers of Bermúdez' multicellular, they differ in the staircase design, apartment models, and façade elements. According to Manuel López (1986) the reductionist process ends in this model as the design suppressed balconies, which increased the monotony of the façade, an effect that the architects attempted to alleviate by adding random sections of color with the use of *policromías* (polychromies) designed by modern Venezuelan artist Mateo Manaure, who also worked with Villanueva in Caracas' University City. The modified DL and its variations are deployed in large numbers in the *2 de Diciembre* project and in other complexes such as *Simón Rodríguez*, *23 de*

¹⁴ Then 19 different barrios create a big informal system (Meza, 2009) This system is very visible in 1954 when entering Caracas using the recently opened Caracas-La Guaira highway that connects Venezuela's capitol to the main port and airport.

Noviembre and *Pariata*. The last two are located in the coastal areas close to the airport, and are the only *superbloque* complexes located outside the metropolitan area of Caracas.

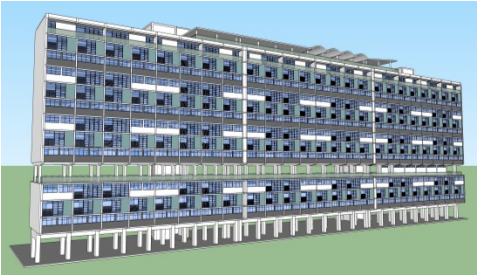

Both the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez and the *superbloque* projects ended in January 1958. Eight *superbloque* models were designed between 1951 and 1956 by the *Banco Obrero* architects led by Villanueva. After his tenure in *Banco Obrero*, Villanueva continued his practice and became more active as a faculty member teaching design studio and history in the Universidad Central's (UCV) School of Architecture in the University City, that he had designed. In spite of his relationship with the dictatorship, Villanueva continued to be a well-respected professional and is still considered the most relevant figure of Venezuela's modern architecture. Bermudez, Celis Cepero, Brando, and Mijares also continued their practices and followed Villanueva to the School of Architecture as well.

Table IV.1 Superbloque Design Evolution with Schemes of Representative Floorplans (not in scale)				
Wave 1 1952	Wave 2 1953-1954	Wave 3 1955	Wave 4 1956	Wave 5 1957
<p>U. H. Cerro Grande Guido Bermúdez Case Study 1 14 stories, 144 apartments</p> 	<p>Multicelular Cerro Piloto Guido Bermúdez 15 stories 150-160 apartments</p> 	<p>Modified DL 1955 Carlos Brando 15 stories 150 apartments</p>	<p>Modified DL 1956 Carlos Brando Case Study 2 15 stories 150 apartments</p>	<p>Modified DL 1957 Carlos Brando 15 stories 150 apartments</p>
<p>El Paraíso Carlos Raúl Villanueva 18 stories, 182 apartments</p> 	<p>Diego de Losada Carlos Brando José Mijares 15 stories 150 apartments</p>			
<p>Quinta Crespo (Unbuilt) Carlos Raúl Villanueva 12 stories, 118 apartments</p> 				

IV. 2. Case Studies

The research design focuses on two case studies, as representative samples that describe the evolution of the *superbloque* typology and the current living conditions of their residents. These two cases studies represent the first and last waves in the evolution of the *superbloque* and house two different social groups. The first case study is the *Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande*, designed by Guido Bermudez under the supervision of Carlos Raul Villanueva. *Cerro Grande*, along with *El Paraíso* and *Quinta Crespo*, was part of the “original trilogy” of *superbloques*. The second case study is in the family of the modular unit *Diego de Losada* (DL), the efficiency-driven design by Carlos Brando deployed in large numbers to create the largest complex of *superbloques* from among those originally inaugurated as *2 de Diciembre* to commemorate the beginning of Pérez Jiménez regime in 1952. This complex was later re-named *23 de Enero* to memorialize the date in which the regime was officially overthrown in 1958. Henceforth, I use *23 de Enero* to refer to this project. While *Cerro Grande* represents the original ambitions of *superbloque* planners and was aimed at middle income residents, the buildings in *23 de Enero* were designed to address the increasing demand for affordable housing for low-income residents who were to be forcefully removed from slums. The original residents of *Cerro Grande* were a homogenous group of middle class residents including military, young professionals, and employees in the public sector, whereas the original residents of *23 de Enero* were a heterogeneous group that included also military and public employees but from a lower strata of society, as well as former informal settlers and, after 1958, squatters that invaded a number of the unfinished buildings once the dictatorship was overthrown. The initial

assumption was that these two communities used different sets of tactics to adapt to the buildings.

Table IV.2 Case-Studies Research	
Unidad de Habitación <i>Cerro Grande</i> 1952-1954	<i>23 de Enero</i> (<i>superbloque Diego de Losada</i> DL modified 1956)
 <i>Cerro Grande</i> main façade (south east)	 Deگو de Losada main façade (typically north)
Designed by Guido Bermudez under the supervision of Villanueva in the School of Architecture to obtain his Bachelor degree	Designed by Carlos Brando in TABO in 1953 with subsequent modifications in 1955 and 1956
Architectural features: "Pilotis" at the ground level, open plan on the fourth floor with communal facilities. Open terrace with canopy on the roof. Satellite buildings with commercial spaces (built) and daycare facilities (not built)	Architectural features: Repetitive systems using different types of enclosure in the façade with randomly colored sections. Shared community services and sport courts located nearby.
Structural features: Light concrete frame with one bay plus cantilevers	Structural features: Dense concrete frame with three bays and no cantilevers
Circulation: Corridors every three levels, similar to Moisei Glnzburg's Dom Kommuna and Le Corbusier's Unités d'habitation, Marseille. Two vertical towers with staircases and elevators	Circulation: Corridors every four levels. Five staircases per building and a tower with elevators
Apartments: 144 Two models: two storied 3-bedroom and 4-bedroom apartments	Apartments: 150 per modular unit Four models (all single story). Two bedrooms open to corridors. Three-4 bedrooms open to the staircases
Dimensions (without circulation towers) 122m. x 11m. (400 ft. x 36 ft.) 14 stories	Dimensions (without circulation tower) 80m. x 12,5m. (263 ft. x 41 ft.)
Single standing building	Modular unit: 55 units built, some of them combined to form larger <i>superbloques</i>

IV. 2. a. Cerro Grande: the First Superbloque

The architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock included the *superbloque Cerro Grande* in his monograph *Latin American Architecture* published in 1955 and commissioned by Philip Johnson and the Museum of Modern Art of New York. Hitchcock traveled to 11 countries in Latin America to find examples of modern architecture and in Venezuela he was received by Carlos Raul Villanueva. Among the buildings selected by Hitchcock in Venezuela was the recently opened *Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande* that he glowing described:

As its very name indicates, this block of apartments built by the Banco Obrero, the Venezuelan Housing Authority, is inspired by Le Corbusier's *Unite d'habitation* at Marseille. (...) On the front the skillful variation in the sash sizes –and even their color- suggest the internal complexity of the two storeyed units and help to retain a domestic scale within the monumental scale of the block as a whole. On the rear of the freestanding elevator towers, linked by bridges to the galleries of access, offer a bolder and more dramatic sort of composition. The range of shops, coming forward at right angles, is more conveniently located for public access than Le Corbusier's at Marseilles, and justifies the community idea implicit in the term *Unidad* (Hitchcock, 1955, p.135).

Guido Bermudez designed *Cerro Grande* as the final requirement for his bachelor's degree under the supervision of Carlos Raul Villanueva at the then recently opened school of architecture in Caracas (Meza 2011). *Cerro Grande* is a single building 400 ft. x 36 ft. in plan and 14-stories high with 144 housing units consisting of two types 48 4-bedroom apartments and 96 3-bedroom apartment. Rather than using Le Corbusier's central hallway layout developed in Marseille, Bermúdez created a hallway that opens up to the exterior, which is more closely related to Ginzburg's

Narkonfim housing in Moscow. This layout allows a narrower block and the open hallway is better adapted to Caracas' climate. The similarities with the Soviet building are evident in both the apartment layout and the vertical arrangement of the building. Each 3-bedroom apartment has two stories and the 4-bedroom units are accessible from the main corridor using a staircase. Every corridor provides access to 36 apartments, (12 4-bedrooms and 24 3-bedrooms). Units are arranged in such way that public corridors occurs only every three stories.

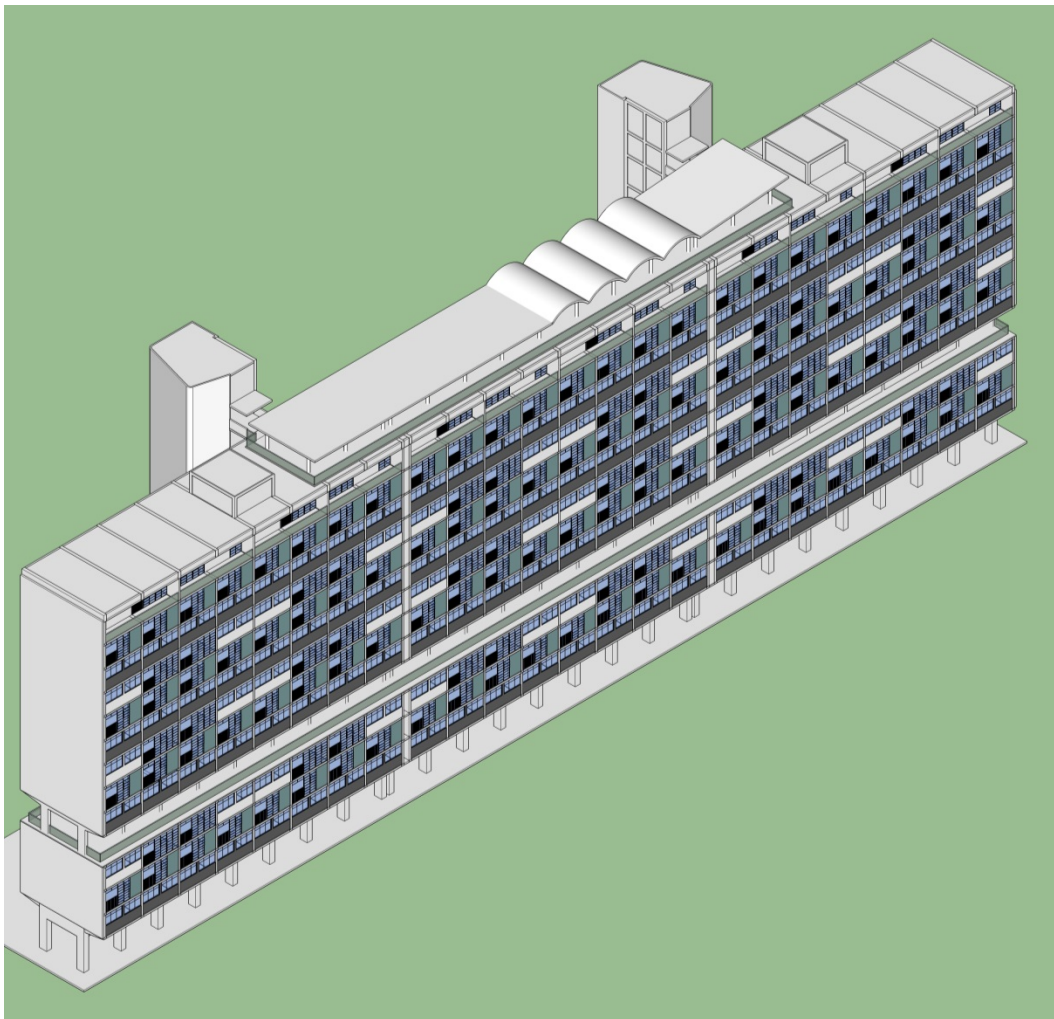


Figure IV-1. Superbloque Cerro Grande designed by Bermúdez and Villanueva

Bermúdez and Villanueva referenced both Le Corbusier's and Ginzburg's buildings in the way they incorporated social services in the building. Like Marseille's *Unité*, *Cerro Grande* has an accessible roof top with a covered area but lacks the formal intensity of the earlier *Unité*. Like *Narkonfim*, the building has a smaller satellite structure on the south side containing commercial areas. Besides these two strategies, the authors also decided to leave the fourth floor as an open plan with communal services (laundry and daycare). The resulting open gap at the fourth floor is its most distinctive formal feature and is similar to other examples in contemporary and later residential complexes such as *Pedregulho* in Rio De Janeiro by Affonso Eduardo Reidy (1947-1950): the *Il quartiere Forte-Quezzi* in Genoa, Italy, by Luigi Carlo Daneri (1956), and *Las Flores* in A Coruña, Spain, by Ramón Vazquez Molezún y Jose A. Corrales (1965).

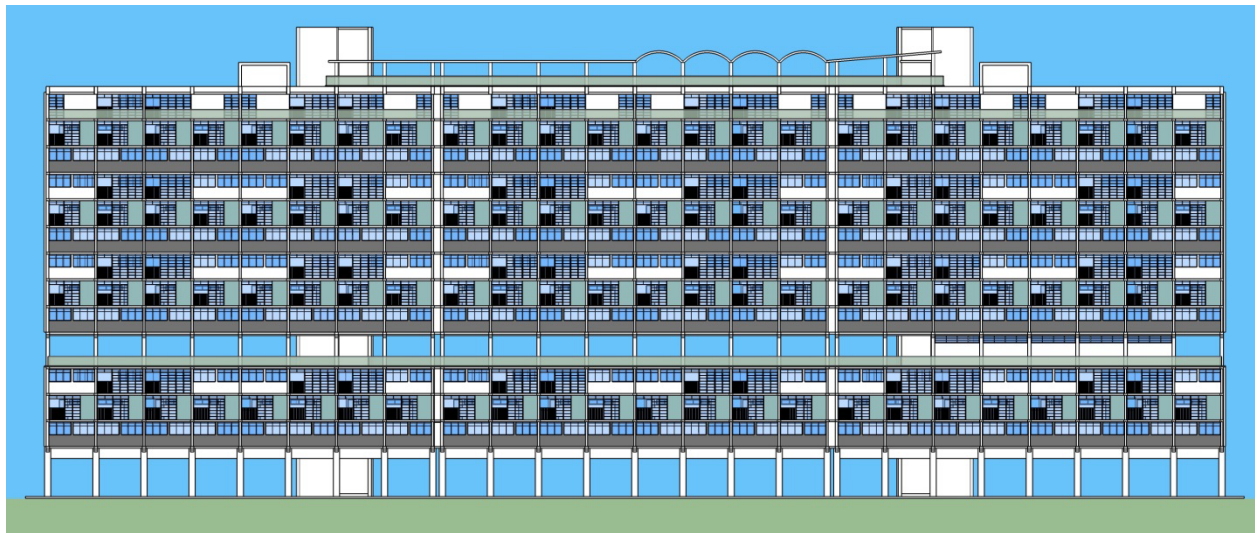


Figure IV-2 Cerro Grande's east elevation (original 1954 layout)

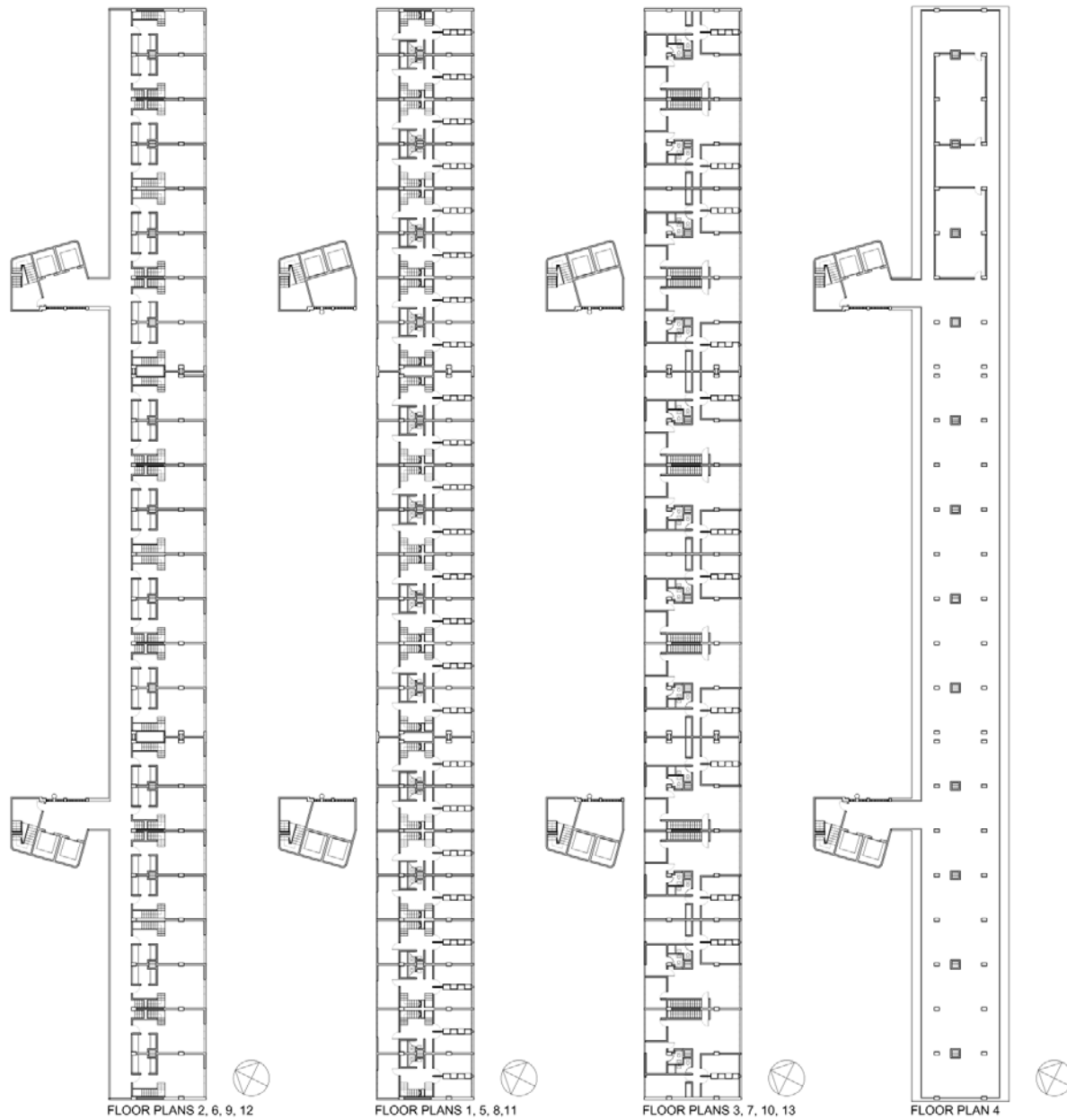


Figure IV-3. Cerro Grande floor plans (originals 1954). Redrawn from the information available

IV. 2. a. 23 de Enero (Former 2 de Diciembre)

Unlike the single standing *Cerro Grande*, *23 de Enero* is an extensive complex of *superbloques* located just west of Caracas' downtown representing the ultimate statement of the government purpose: the eradication of informal settlements. In *23 de Enero* there are not only *superbloques* but also four-story buildings and a variety of

communal services and commercial facilities. The simplicity of the building design reduced the construction time and created a “construction frenzy” (Meza, 2008), never repeated in the history of public works in Venezuela.

Table IV 3. <i>23 de Enero</i> Complex Totals (López, 1986)	
Phase	Totals
Phase 1, <i>Sector Este</i> , 1955	12 <i>Superbloques</i> (1 double) 26 4-story blocks 4 Kindergartens 4 Day care facilities 4 Commercial buildings 2,336 apartments
Phase 2, <i>Sector Central</i> , 1956 Case Study	13 <i>Superbloques</i> (3 double) 9 4-story blocks (all double) 2 Elementary schools 6 Kindergartens 4 Day care 11 Commercial buildings 1 Public market 2,688 apartments
Phase 3, <i>Sector Oeste</i> , 1957	13 <i>Superbloques</i> (5 triple and 3 double) 7 4-Story blocks (1 triple and 3 double) 3 Elementary schools 7 Kindergartens 1 Communal center 10 Commercial buildings 1 Public market 4,122 apartments
Totals	38 <i>Superbloques</i> (55 modular units of 150 apartments) 42 4-story buildings 17 Kindergartens 8 Day cares 25 Commercial buildings 5 Elementary schools 2 Public markets 1 Communal center 9,146 apartments

All *superbloques* deployed in *23 de Enero* are variations of the *Diego de Losada* model developed in 1953. From 1953 to 1956, Carlos Brando was in charge of the design of the *Diego de Losada* and its variations working under the consultancy of

Carlos Raul Villanueva. Unlike *Cerro Grande*, the modular *Diego de Losada* was a simplified model with no communal services included within its structure and with a more efficient and stable structural system with no cantilevers. Following local codes to address earthquake risks, the building is split into three independent structural sections. The modularity of the *Diego de Losada* permitted the addition of two or three buildings to create double and triple *superbloques*. There are ten apartments per level with 4-, 3-, and 2-bedroom units vertically connected by five stairwells. These numbers are twofold or threefold in double and triple *superbloques*. There is only one tower with elevators connecting corridors at the fourth, eighth and twelfth floor. From these corridors, residents can take one of 5 staircases to reach apartments on other levels. This layout offers multiple choices for residents to reach a given apartment but stairwells lack natural daylight, an issue that was addressed in the 1956 models.

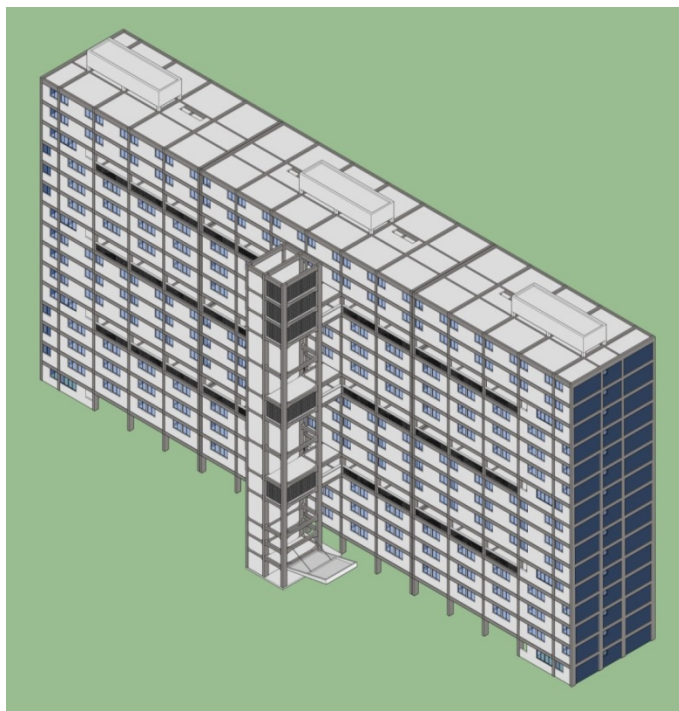


Figure IV-4. Superbloque Diego de Losada (modified in 1956) designed by Carlos Brando (original layout)

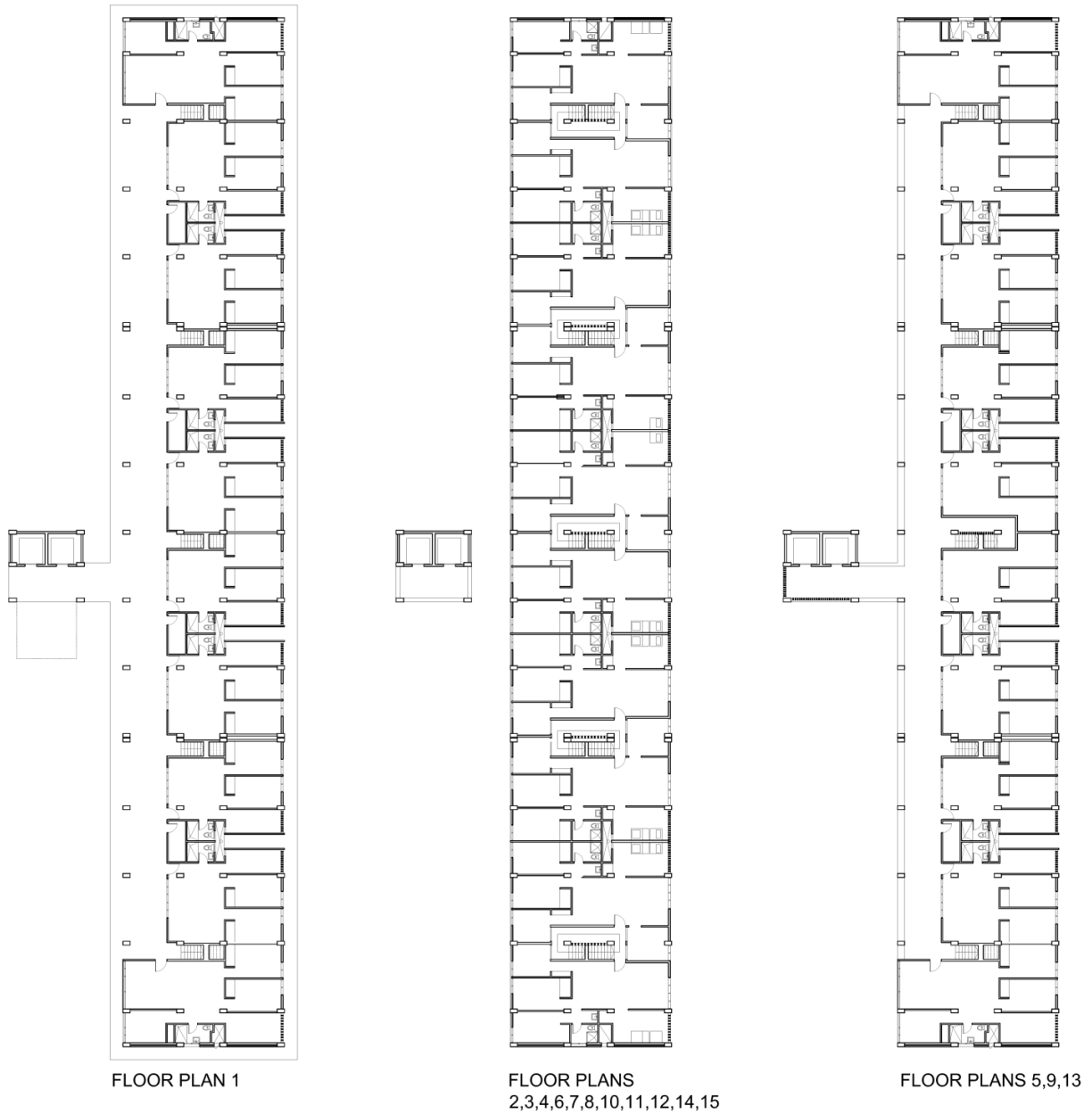


Figure IV-5 Floor plans of the superbloque Diego de Losada (modified 1956) Redrawn from the information available

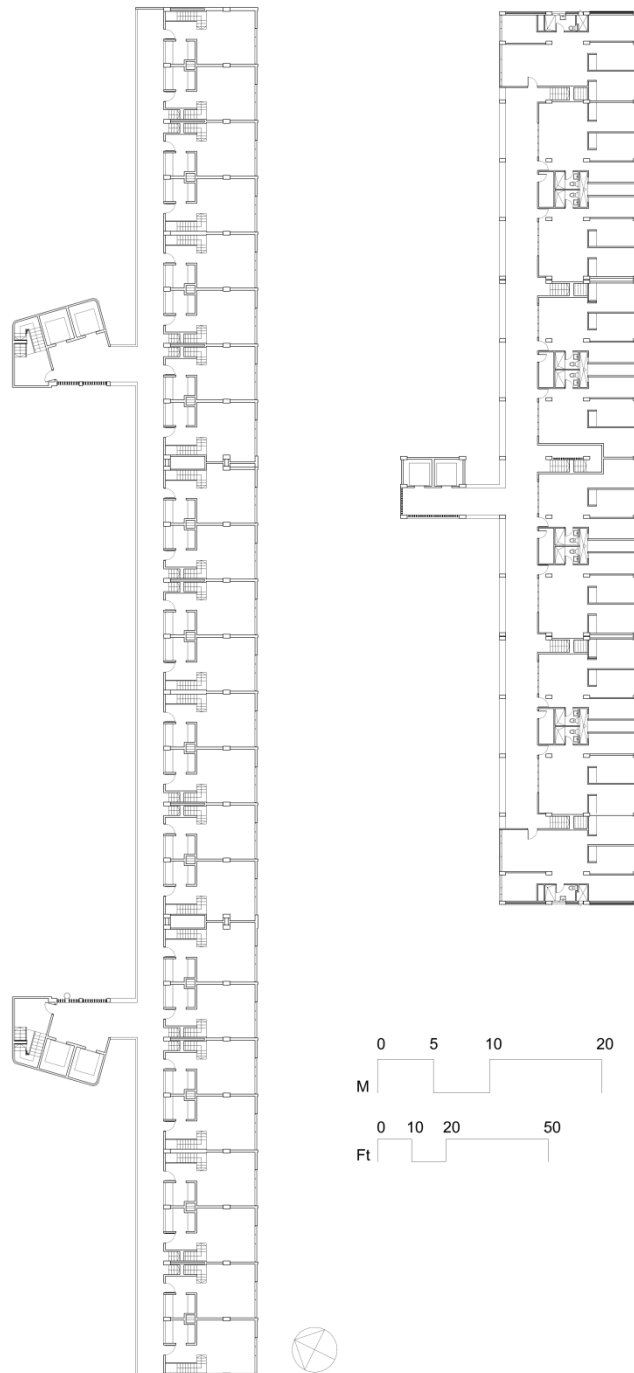


Figure IV-6 Floor plans of Cerro Grande (left) and the 1956 modified Diego de Losada (right)

IV. 2. b. Contrasting Characteristics of Case Studies

Cerro Grande and the Modular *Diego de Losada* in its 1956 version represent the initial and final stage respectively of *superbloque* evolution used by the architects of

Banco Obrero (Lopez, 1986). Although they belong to the same building type, from an architectural standpoint, these two buildings have different characteristics. They have almost the same number of apartments (144 in *Cerro Grande* and 150 in the 1956 DL) but while *Cerro Grande* has only two apartment types, the buildings in *23 de Enero* have four types from 2 to 4 bedrooms. Crucially, these two buildings are dissimilar in their overall layout and amount of common areas. *Cerro Grande* includes communal spaces and facilities within its structure, whereas the common spaces in *Diego de Losada*, although generous in area, are entirely limited to circulation. The building technology aspects of these two buildings are not essentially different as they both use concrete structural frames, but the configuration of this frame in *Cerro Grande* allows for cantilevers while in the 1956 DL the regular frame is part of the façade design, thus increasing the perception of monotony. Overall, *Cerro Grande* reflects the ambitious first stage of the *superbloques* development with many more spatial and architectural amenities compared to the rigorous constrained order in the building of *23 de Enero*, a change that was driven by the need to economize and to shorten construction schedules.

Probably the most important contrasting features of these examples are related to their context. While *Cerro Grande* stands alone in an urban context, the buildings in *23 de Enero* are located in a context that was conceived and designed for them. However, there are similarities in the way the contexts have evolved in both cases as informal settlers and their housing proliferated in the surroundings of these *superbloques*.

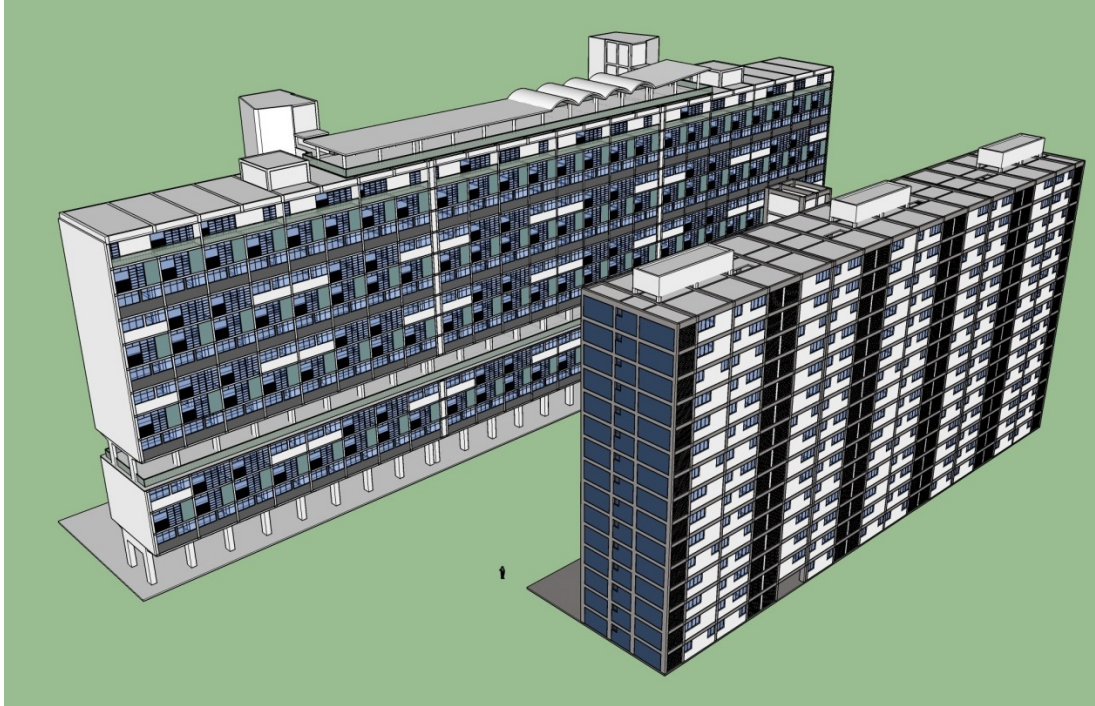


Figure IV-7 Cerro Grande and Modified Diego de Losada 1956. Main facades

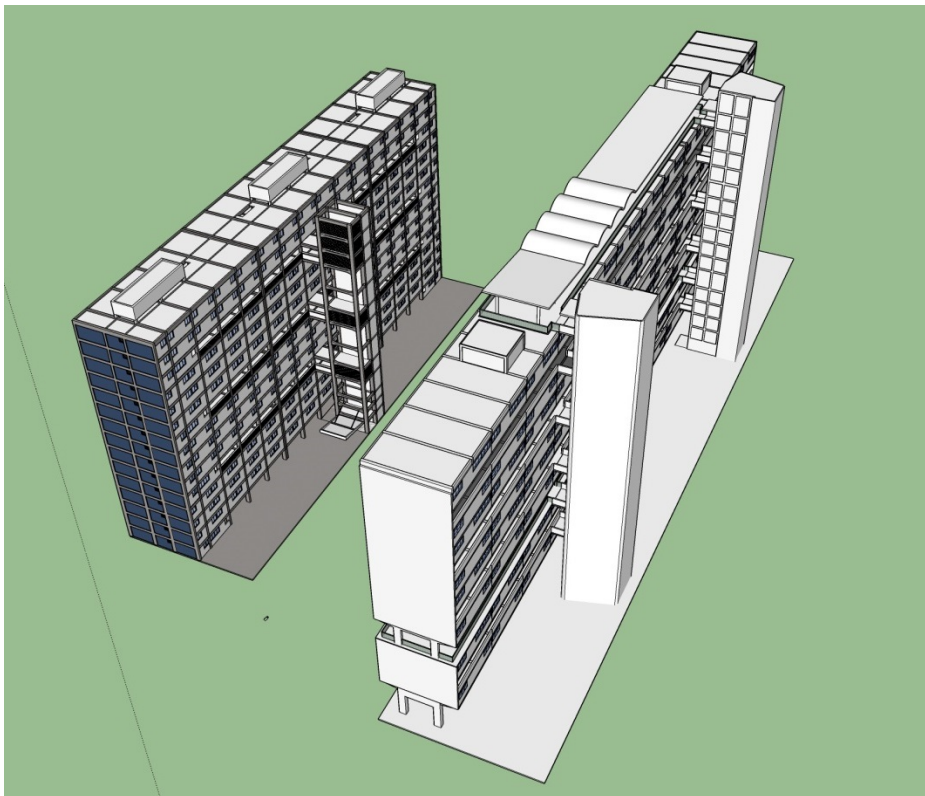


Figure IV-8 Cerro Grande and Modified Diego de Losada 1956. Circulation towers

IV. 3. Analysis

The architectural analysis evaluates these categories: massing, structural layout, circulation, envelope, and floor plans. The tools of architectural analysis come from four sources. Three of these sources are the analytical guidelines by Geoffrey Baker (1996) Clark and Pause (1984) and Simon Unwin (2014). These authors provide various tools to analyze architecture from a phenomenological perspective. The study also follows the analytical structure developed by Aurora Fernandez Per and Javier Mozas in his book *10 Stories of Collective Housing* (2013). Overall, the formal and spatial qualities of *Cerro Grande* are more complex than the 1956 DL block as a result of the reductionist process of the building design developed within *Banco Obrero*. Guido Bermúdez and Villanueva are closely related to Le Corbusier's philosophy, *Cerro Grande* showcases design aspects already developed by the Swiss master in his 1948 design for the *Unité* in Marseille whereas the 1956 DL design suppresses most of these aspects.

IV. 3. a. Massing

The three-dimensional representation of a building is its most predominant perceptual property (Clark, Pause, 2006) and in the case of *superbloques*, the massive dimensions emphasize this feature. *Cerro Grande*'s mass is more articulated as the relationship between solid and voids are more complex. Bermúdez translated one of the design principles developed by Le Corbusier, the use of *Pilotis* at the ground level, to lift the building up from the ground. The open fourth floor creates an interruption in the vertical façade. Both operations along with the stepping back of the structure from the façade relieve its relative heaviness. The open fourth floor breaks the vertical development and emphasizes the horizontal, thus lightening the perception of gravity.

The two circulation towers in the back offer a contrasting vertical force to the horizontality of the mass of the slab.

The massing of the 1956 DL block reflects the simplicity of its program compared to *Cerro Grande*. The elimination of communal functions from the structure creates a simplified mass with no significant subtractions or additions. As part of the reductionist process, the excessive rationalization of the construction process limited the variations and the solid/void interactions.

In its spatial configuration, *Cerro Grande* is an example of stratification (Unwin, 2014). According to Unwin, due to natural limitations of vertical movement, humans move in horizontal directions that “architects tend to accept and sometimes to celebrate” (p. 203) by emphasizing the organization of spaces in horizontal platforms. By taking the vertical circulation out of the block's layout, Guido Bermúdez was able to work with the different levels of the buildings as continuous horizontal platforms. The open fourth floor, the open hallways, and the roof emphasize the stratification of functions in this building.

IV. 3. b. Structural Design

Besides its role as a physical support for the building, Geoffrey Baker (1996) suggests that the structure can be conceived “as a means of creating sense of the static or dynamic of the building” (p.36). Simon Unwin (2014) proposes three broad categories to analyze the relationship between structure and spatial organization: “the dominant structural order, the dominant spatial order, or the harmonic relationship between the two” (p.177). Before modernity, the structural order was the dominant force in many architectural examples but the technical advances allowed the separation of the

structural order from the spatial layout as walls and facades no longer needed to be structural. Modern design principles favored the independence of the structural system as technological advances permitted the use of linear elements such as columns and beams. Le Corbusier championed this principle and put it into effect in his early designs for free-standing houses. The independence of columns and walls in these buildings allowed the development of the concept of free plan and free façade, and since walls could be non-structural, the spatial layout did not necessarily match the structural grid. The use of steel or concrete frames allowed the construction of high-rise buildings in a relatively short time period, but the regularity of the grid and the size of the structural elements became more predominant as buildings attained greater heights.

In both types of *superbloques*, the regularity of the structural concrete frame was a predominant force in the design, which had an impact on the spatial configuration, but beyond these basic similarities both structural systems have significant differences. Since Guido Bermúdez's design emphasizes length over width, the structural system is narrower and less dense. The modular frame of *Cerro Grande* is 5.50 m. (18 ft.) wide by 5.00 m. (16.5 ft.) long with 2.70 m. (8.8 ft.) cantilevers on both sides. The levels are every 2.70 m. (8.8 ft.) with the exception of the first level and the fourth level at 5.20 (17 ft.) and 3.60 m. (11.8 ft.) respectively. All *Diego de Losada* models share the same structural frame which has more elements (column and beams) than *Cerro Grande*. Three bays of 4.40 m. (14.4 ft.), 3.70 (11.8 ft.) and 4.70 m (15.4 ft.) spanning every 5.25 m (18 ft.). Levels are every 2.60 m. (8.5 ft.). In both buildings the frame is interrupted twice to deflect earthquake forces.

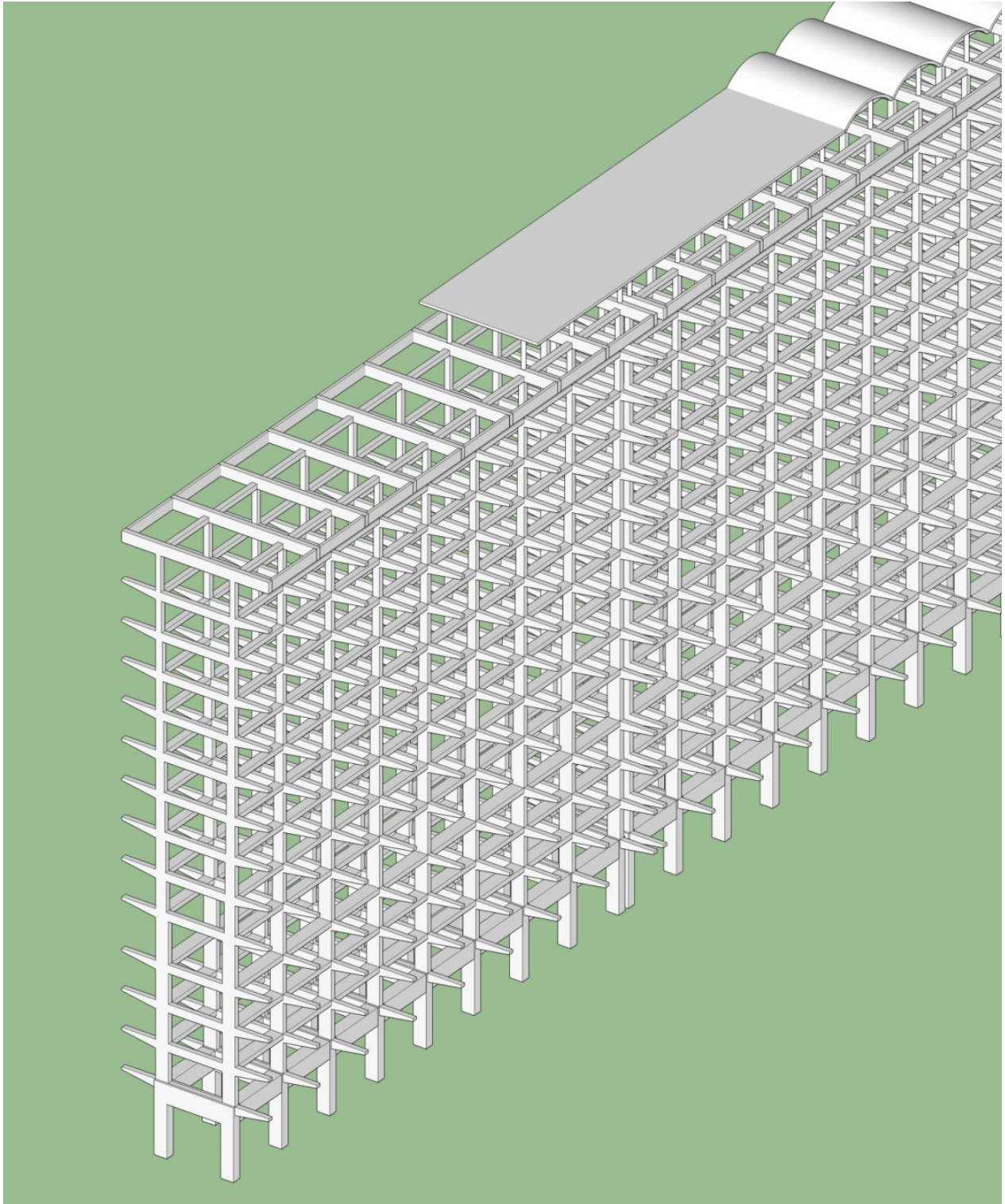


Figure IV-9 Cerro Grande structural frame

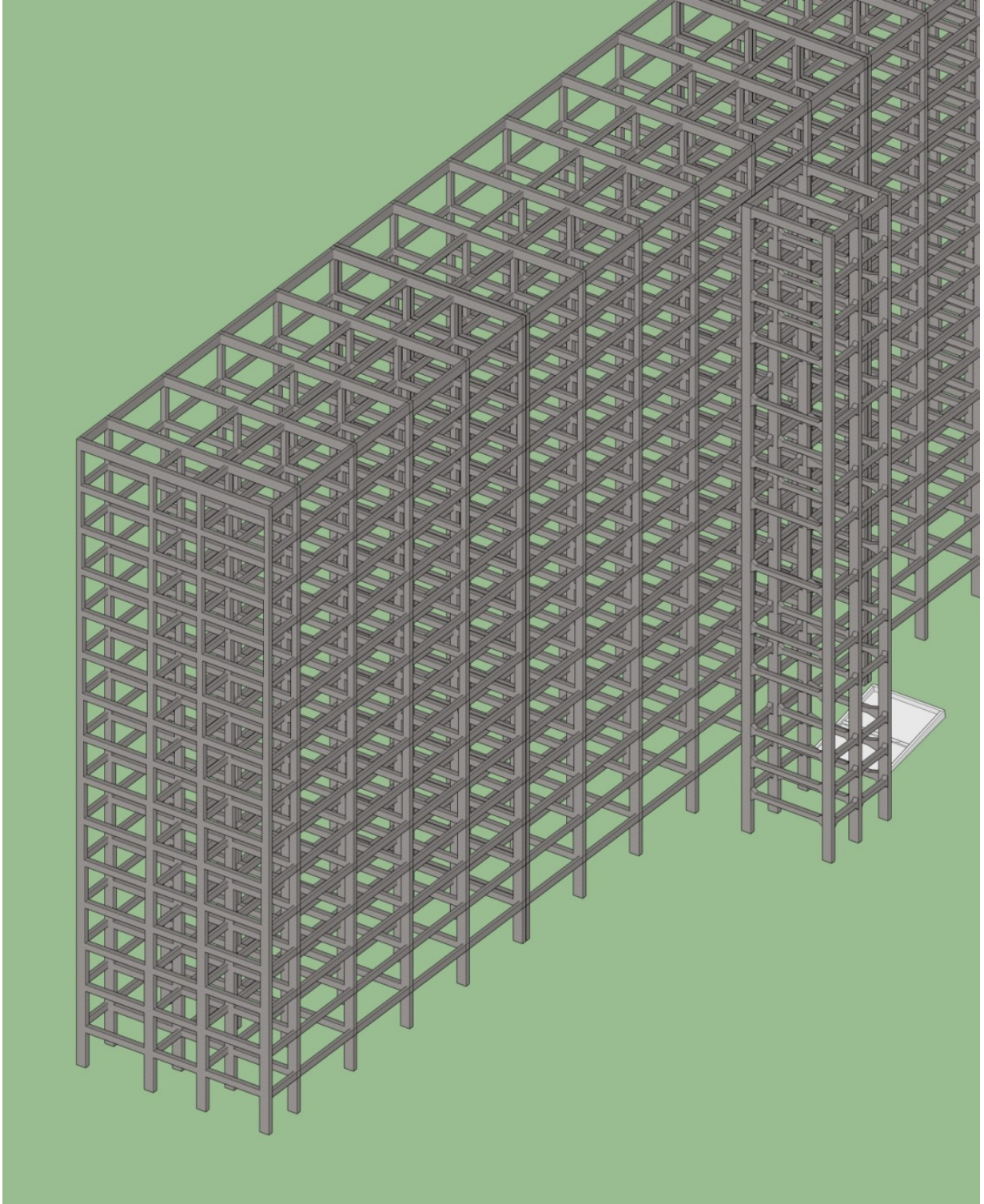


Figure IV-10 Diego de Losada structural frame

Cerro Grande's slim structural design with cantilevers allowed for a façade free of structural elements emphasizing horizontality over verticality and a layering effect as the columns recede from the façade. The triple-bay design of *Diego de Losada* allowed more physical stability but its expression on the façade emphasized the monotony of repetitive elements. While the spatial and structural layout seems to harmonize in *Cerro Grande*, the structural frame dominates the spatial layout in the 1956 DL. Other buildings by Villanueva (Figure IV-11), who influenced these two designs, also show the structural frame as an ordering element in the façade and the use of cantilevers to create intermediate spaces in the façade.



Figure IV-11 Villanueva's School of Architecture and planning showing different designs for both the north and south facade.

IV. 3. c. Envelope

The design of the envelope in both buildings reflects its structural layout (Figure IV-12). *Cerro Grande's* structural layout with cantilevers permit the development of the

façade as a free plane in the same fashion Le Corbusier proposed in one of his five points for a new architecture. However, the modularity of the residential design limited the expression of horizontal forces in the apartment facades. The apartments in *Cerro Grande* have a limited amount of options for enclosure using glass and lower walls depending on the program (social or private) but the combinations of these options allow for a dynamic result. In contrast, the structural order expressed on the façade of the Diego de Losada buildings was limited to walls punched with windows or ventilation grilles that were very popular in the 1950s (Figure IV-12). There are only two types of windows--square and rectangular leaving little room for variations. The architects used color to alleviate the monotony of the final facades.

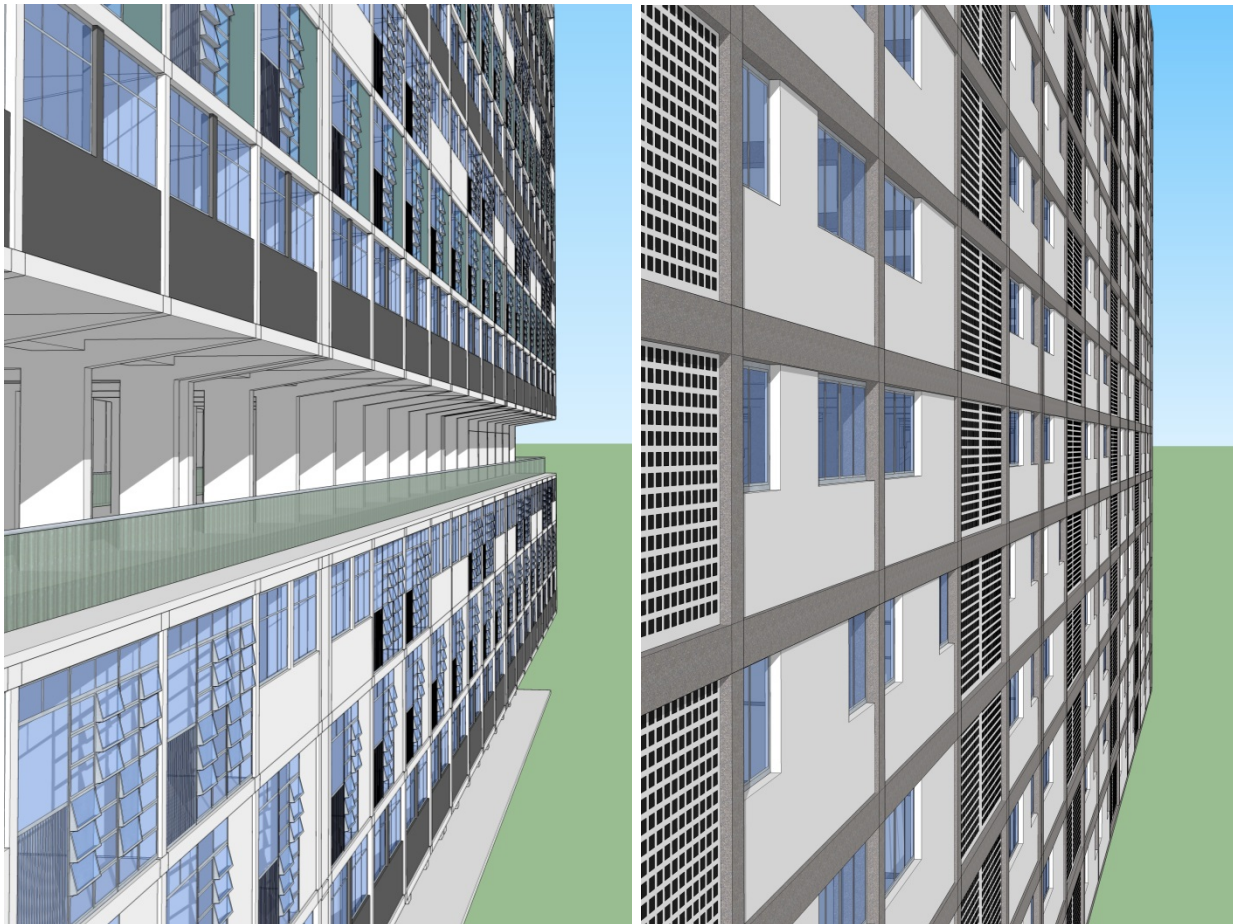


Figure IV-12 Cerro Grande (left) and Diego de Losada (right). Detail of the envelope

IV. 3. d. Circulation Layout

Although based on the same intention of minimizing circulation space by creating corridors on fewer levels, the circulation schemes follow two different approaches with respect to the vertical circulation. Because of the stratification of the program and the limited space in the narrow building, Bermúdez situates the vertical circulation in two identical but mirrored towers on the back side of the building. These towers connect directly to open corridors in the buildings at the second, fourth, sixth, ninth and twelfth floors. The two-storied 3-bedrooms apartments are connected directly to this corridor and the 4-bedrooms are connected to it through a staircase. In *Diego de Losada* the circulation configuration is entirely different since the staircases are located inside the structure. Carlos Brando's design merges the idea of the horizontal corridors with staircases inside the block and a vertical tower only for elevators. This innovative design creates multiple options to circulate vertically and horizontally inside the buildings. While *Cerro Grande* residents only have two options in traveling from the ground floor to their apartment, *23 de Enero* residents have multiple options from the ground level, starting from five staircases and the elevator tower. At every fourth level, all the staircases and the elevator connect to an open hallway with entrances to 2-bedroom apartments, enabling the user to change staircase. Three-and-four- bedroom apartments are connected to the staircases. Two diagrams show how the circulation system works in each case (Figure IV-13. and Figure IV-15.). *Cerro Grande's* circulation depends mainly on the two towers that connect to 36 apartments each. *Diego de Losada's* diagram shows the multiple options in horizontal and vertical circulation, creating a vertical grid. The circulation layout of *Cerro Grande* emphasizes the corridors as integrating spaces

for the neighbors at each level, allowing them to organize in groups according to level, whereas this option is not possible in *23 de Enero* as there are multiple vertical and horizontal options and thus many different ways to circulate. The neighbors living in 2-bedroom apartments could connect to other residents in their corridors but the residents in the staircases face more challenges to organize themselves in vertical sections.

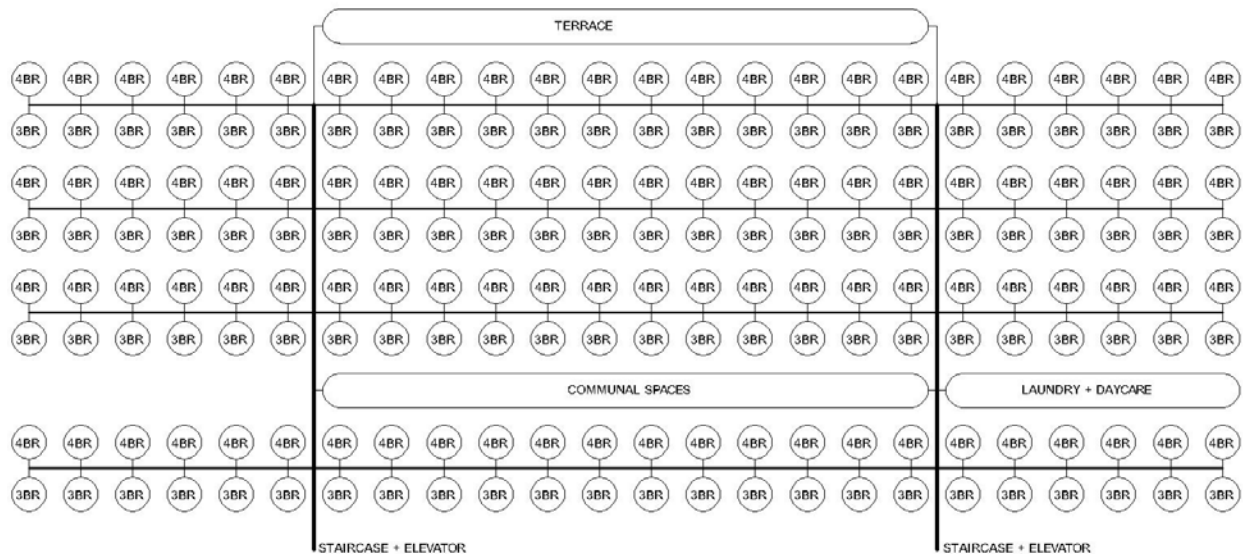


Figure IV-13. Diagram of Cerro Grande's public circulation. The two vertical lines represent the two circulation towers with elevators and stairwells. There are five levels with public access to covered corridors and the terrace. Apartments are connected directly to these corridors (see below).



Figure IV-14 Open corridor in the twelfth level of Cerro Grande. The picture is taken close to the north circulation tower looking toward the south one. The door in the foreground is that of a 3-Bedroom apartment. 4-bedroom apartments in the upper level are accessible from this corridor using staircases.

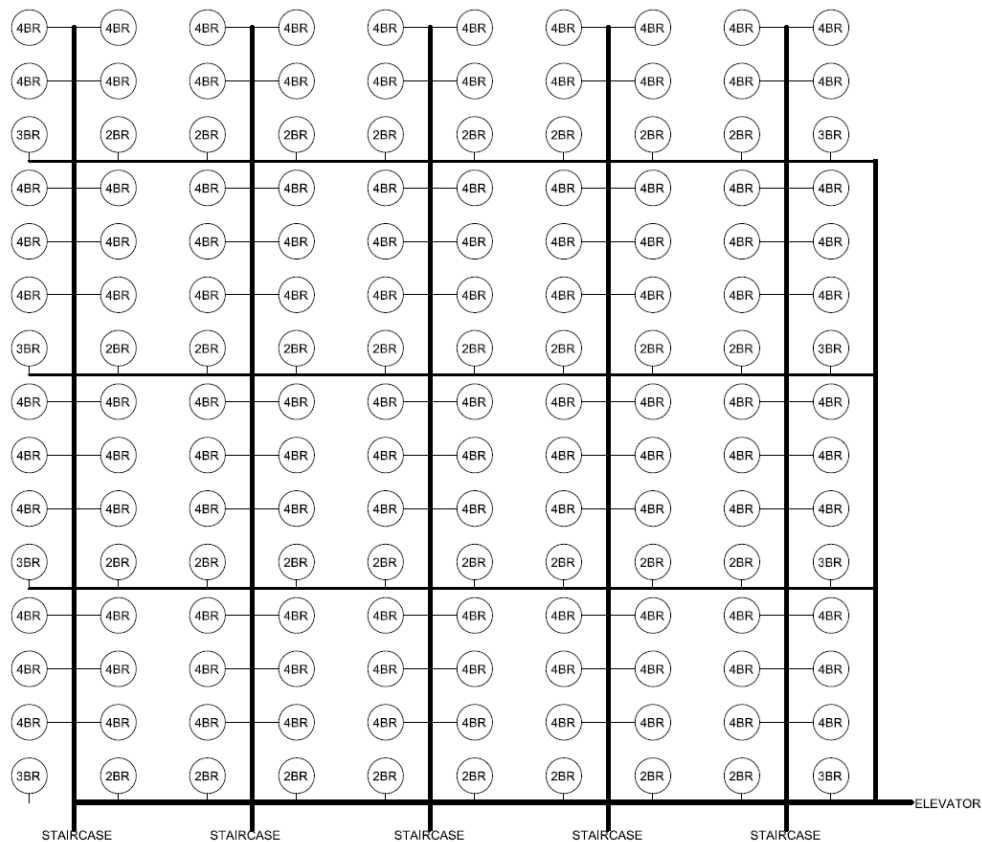


Figure IV-15. Diagram of 23 de Enero public circulation. In this single-block layout, five staircases and the elevator tower are directly connected to the ground level. Apartments are connected to staircases and horizontal corridors allow people to change corridors.



Figure IV-16 Corridor in 23 de Enero's building number 17 in the ninth floor. The doors correspond to 2-bedroom apartments.

IV. 3. e. Apartments

The two buildings house several types of apartments and the architects took the opportunity to create openings on both sides in order to improve natural ventilation and daylighting. The main characteristics and floor plans of the apartments are described in Table IV.4 and IV.5

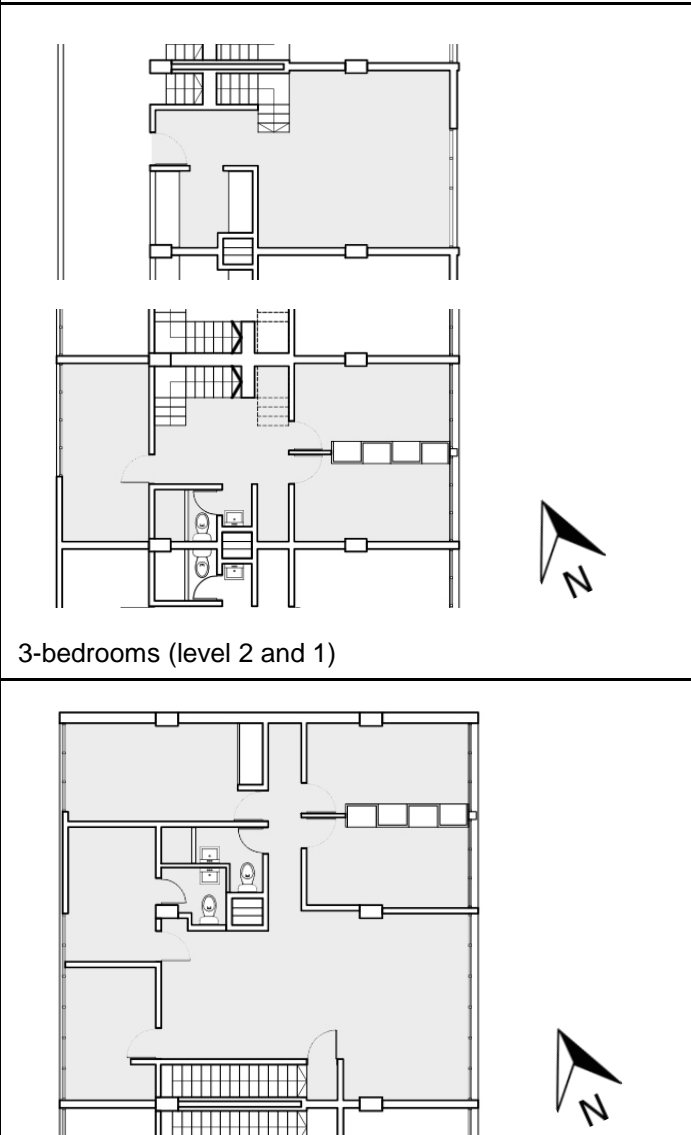
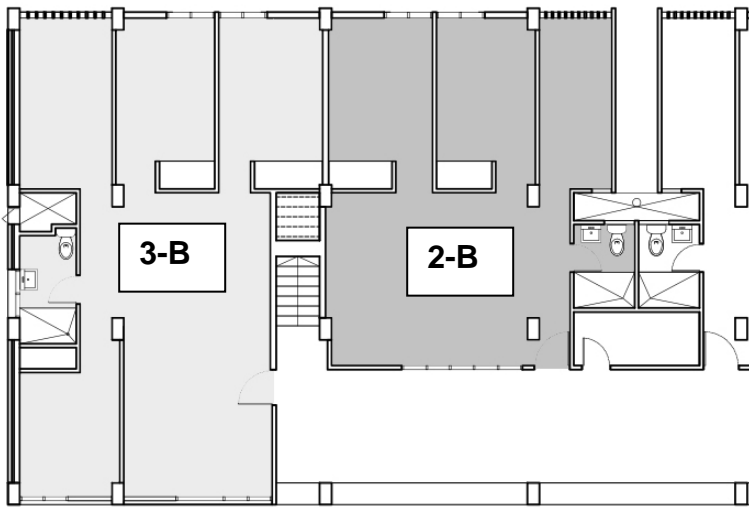
Table IV 4. <i>Cerro Grande</i> Apartments (redrawn)	
<p><i>Cerro Grande</i> has two types of apartments: a two-story 3-bedroom and a single-story 4-bedroom. The 3-bedroom units are connected to the public corridor. The kitchen, dining, and living areas are located in the upper level; bedrooms and bathroom are located on the lower level. A large room faces the northwest façade and two smaller rooms face southwest. The bathrooms and the kitchen are stacked in the center of the structure sharing a vertical shaft containing utilities. The 4-bedroom apartment is accessed from the public hallway using a staircase that is stacked above a three bedroom apartment's interior staircase. The 4-bedroom is slightly larger than the 3-bedroom and occupies a double bay with one-and-a-half bathrooms. The two bedrooms are located in a way similar to the three-bedroom unit with two larger bedrooms facing southwest. The kitchen is also more spacious compared to the 3-bedroom with more storage space. The bathroom has the sink outside.</p>	<p>Floorplans</p>  <p>3-bedrooms (level 2 and 1)</p> <p>4-bedrooms</p>

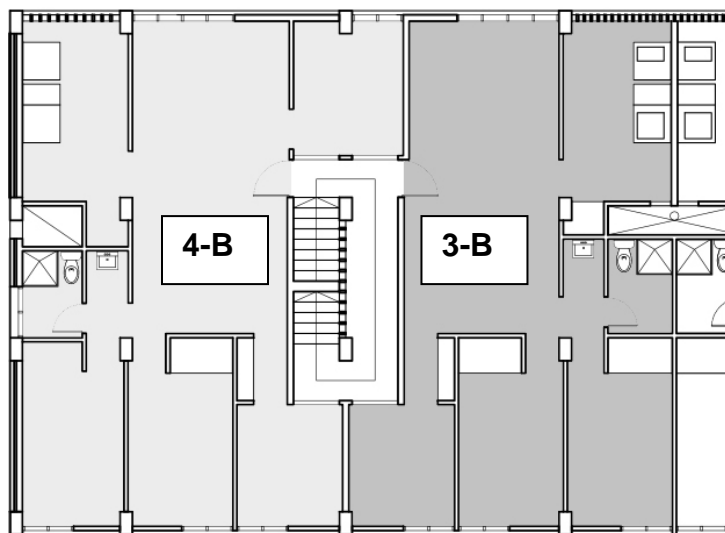
Table IV 5. *23 de Enero* Apartments (redrawn)

In the 1956 DL, there are four types of apartments all single-story of 4-, 3-, and 2-bedrooms. The Cerro Piloto plan included a study of families living in the slums where *23 de Enero* was erected. One of the recommendations of this study was to design different types of apartments addressing variable household sizes. Addressing this recommendation, Guido Bermúdez designed eight types of apartments for the *multicelular* CP and Carlos Brando designed four types in 1956 DL. Following the dominant structural order the apartments shared similar properties including the size of the kitchen and social areas but varying the number of rooms. All apartments, even those with four bedrooms are designed with just one bathroom that in some cases has the sink outside.

Floorplans



3-bedrooms and 2-bedrooms



4-bedrooms and 3-bedrooms

V. Chapter Five: Re-Visiting *Superbloques*

Researchers have studied user-defined transformations of physical settings using field research and observation as their main tools. Julian Beinart (1971) studied user-defined changes in a segregated town near Johannesburg in South Africa. Between 1918 and 1940, the government developed the Western Native Township to house low-income working class Africans away from white areas. Beinart focuses on the evolution of this relatively small neighborhood as an example of how communities can build a new system of meaning through low-impact physical changes in a rational and repetitive system of low density housing. Beinart studied the way in which residents over time changed three variables (housing, services, and communal facilities) to personalize their housing according to their needs.

Using field observations, he found that residents changed the physical features following two main procedures: spatial adaptation and decoration. To evaluate spatial adaptation, Beinart mapped all changes in houses using predetermined categories such as private additions, porch enclosure, and so forth. To evaluate decoration, Beinart mapped the levels of decorative intensity and the use of specific shapes. By interviewing the residents, Beinart collected data about internal changes in housing units and also found out that decorations had a purpose different from improving the original unfinished facades: they were used as a way-finding device and as a technique to distinguish the particular house in the monotonous landscape. Beinart used field observations and interviews as effective research tools in a setting similar to the one explored in *superbloques*, where residents also interacted with government-built housing that was used to reinforce a political agenda.

Beinart discovered through first-hand observation the changes in the physical layout and categorized the tactics the residents used to adapt the physical layout established by modern architects to their own needs. Philippe Boudon's study of Le Corbusier's Pessac housing (1986) also provides an interesting precedent studying the interaction between residents and the physical layout of modern housing. However, unlike the houses in Pessac, *superbloques* also include common spaces that have also been transformed by residents. The transformation of the physical layout of both individual apartments and communal spaces of the building addresses two environmental scales of the ecosystem perspective: the individual "ways of operating" in a private apartment and by the collective in the building.

V. 1. Field Observations

The field observation process constitutes the first step in the examination of the tactics of residents in appropriating the physical layout. The process is conducted to gain knowledge of the buildings' physical organization by collecting pictures of the existing conditions with focus on user-defined evidences of changes. The visits were completed in Caracas in March 2012 and the summer and fall of 2014. The process itself was predominantly unstructured and I engaged these buildings to avoid preconceptions about what to find. I used the methodology for field observation defined by John Zeisel (2006) to organize data and provide coherence to my findings. Zeisel (2006) defines four categories of physical evidence to look for 1) by-products of use 2) adaptations for use 3) displays of self and 4) public messages. These categories "are organized to increase designers' control over the behavioral effects and side effects of their decisions and to increase people's own control over the relationship to the

environment” (p.169). Of these four categories, adaptations of use and displays of self are considered crucial to the purpose of this study and they are described in more detail. To increase the scope of the analysis, I include the guidelines defined by Clare Cooper Marcus and Wendy Sarkissian (1986) to allow personalization of semi-public areas in housing design as potential descriptors of displays of self. I completed the data collection of the first case study, *Cerro Grande*, in March 2012. Field observations in 23 *de Enero* were recorded by a research assistant, who provided a generous amount of photographs and videos in several phases.

Table V.1 Field Observations. Four Categories to Look For (Zeisel, 2006)			
By-products of use What people do?	Adaptations of use Changes made by users	Displays of self Appropriation of place	Public message Communication to others
Erosions Leftovers Missing traces	Props Separations Connections + Addition Deletion Retrofitting	Personalization Identification Group membership + Cooper Marcus & Sarkissian (1986) Territorial expression Added privacy Component replacement Personal additions	Official Unofficial Illegitimate

V. 1. a. By-products of Use

Looking for “by-products of use” (also known as "behavior traces" or "behavioral traces") means searching for evidence of what people do in a location. According to Zeisel (2006) the search of traces of by-products of use is comparable to detective work in a crime scene as the goal is to describe the past in a specific place based on physical evidence. Zeisel proposes three types of traces: erosions as evidences of use, leftovers

as evidence of activities, and missing traces as evidence of limitations of behaviors (p. 171-172).

The *superbloques* are sixty-year-old buildings with many signs of structural and physical decay but not all of these traces describe the activities of residents. Many of these traces of decay are the result of the natural process of decomposition of materials and systems as a consequence of its continued use or exposure to climate and weather. But other traces of erosion are closely related to the activities of residents and are evident in both *Cerro Grande* and *23 de Enero*. The terrazzo floors of the corridors in both buildings show observable wear. In the *23 de Enero* there are signs of wearing in the walls of the staircases that could be attributed to the lack of handrails, while at another scale, there is also evidence of erosion as a result of continued human interaction. In *Cerro Grande* one of the two trash chutes does not work as a result of excessive and probably inappropriate use. In *23 de Enero* trash chutes have been replaced at least twice because of frequent collapse, but they are in good conditions. In both buildings, trash chutes are visible features on the façade so their condition influences the public perception of trash removal, which a major concern and often mentioned in the interviews.



Figure V-1 Trash chutes were recently replaced in 23 de Enero



Figure V-2 The fourth floor of Cerro Grande with no evidence of activities



Figure V-3 Cerro Grande's roof terrace

From the three types of evidence described by Zeisel for this category, “missing traces” or the absence of evidence of use could be the more useful to reveal certain issues related to these buildings. When approaching *Cerro Grande, and 23 de Enero*, I expected to find more evidence of activities in the common spaces such as tables, chairs, children’s toys and so on. In both cases, however, common spaces were clean and well maintained. The lack of evidence of activity in *Cerro Grande’s* communal space on the fourth floor is clear evidence of the difficulties of residents to appropriate the space. In this area, the lack of furniture, and other props describe perfectly the struggle of neighbors to activate this area, which right now is used only under strict supervision by the condominium board. Likewise with other communal areas such as open corridors that lack evidence of previous or potential activities. In *23 de Enero*, when no evidence of past or potential activities was found, interviews showed that

people were reluctant to use these areas other than for circulation. They also do not let their children play in these corridors unsupervised.

V. 1. b. Public Messages

Zeisel (2006) defines three types of public messages: official, unofficial, and illegitimate. “Official” messages are those set by public or private institutions and can include signs, advertising, names, and so on. They might have a permanent or semi-permanent character. “Unofficial” are those temporary messages that come from institutions or social groups in public spaces such as posters, flyers, or announcements. These types of public messages are temporary. “Illegitimate” messages include public displays not approved by any official institution or in which the source is anonymous. Graffiti is the most frequent source of illegitimate messages and usually involves an unexpected and sometimes aggressive appropriation of public space (p. 177-179).

Official public messages are scarce in *Cerro Grande* but abundant in *23 de Enero*. In *Cerro Grande*, for example, there is no visible sign of the building identity, which in *23 de Enero* is present in the circulation tower of each *superbloque*. Besides the examples described by Zeisel, a common practice in Caracas is to use tall buildings to display oversized advertising signs with private or public messages. The *23 de Enero* complex is a desirable location to locate signs because of its proximity to the highway from La Guaira and Caracas’ main airport. After Hugo Chavez’s government took power in 1999, the use of these buildings as billboards for political propaganda increased. The dimensions of these buildings magnify the impact of these messages in the landscape.



Figure V-4 A mural with the figure of Che Guevara along with two other similar political/historical content. Murals with political messages are abundant in this community. A graffiti is also visible in the foreground.

Unofficial public messages are scattered throughout the 23 de Enero in the form of political murals with historic or political themes, that reinforce the ideological discourse and define the community. These murals often reproduce the faces of locally esteemed heroes among the revolutionary forces such as Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro (Cuba), and *Che* Guevara (Argentina), sometimes merging with historic figures such as Simón Bolívar or religious images. While these murals reinforce the ideological and political agenda of those who support the government, they also have the effect of intimidating people who hold contrary of different political views. These murals also identify who controls the territories within the community.

V. 1. c. Displays of Self

According to Zeisel (2006), residents change their environment to imprint their identity on it or to define a space as their own. There are three types of "display of self" traces: personalization, identification, and group membership (p. 175-177).

“Personalization” is related to the expression of personal identity using props such as collectables, memorabilia, bumper stickers, and so on, in order to appropriate a space or thing. If personalization traces are related to a person's desire to express his or her uniqueness in the space, “identification” directly associate the identity of an individual to a space or object by marking it with names, numbers or signs. Finally, “group membership” emphasizes social affiliation by displaying the connection to existing organizations.

The three types of traces in this category defined by Zeisel are not sufficient to organize and analyze the variety of displays of self in my two case studies. In order to expand the toolset of types of traces, I include Clare Cooper Marcus and Wendy Sarkissian’s work to explain the driving force behind personalization in residential projects. According to Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian (1986), personalization is the series of actions by residents in the process of appropriating a given spatial and physical space. For example, a house is not a “home” until a process of appropriation by the resident has occurred. With personalization, residents add features to claim places and communicate their own meanings. Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian define several guidelines that are useful for designers of new housing to consider in addressing personalization and the traces of self in this case. From the proposed set of personalization guidelines, I select four that apply to this investigation: territorial expression, added privacy, component replacement, and personal additions (Cooper M. & Sarkissian 1986 p. 63-70). These tactics are widely used by residents in both communities.

In the repetitive layout of *superbloques*, personalization plays a crucial role because it improves the residents' perception of the lived environment. The monotony of the formal and spatial layout can be broken through interventions that reflect the uniqueness of residents. However, there are also forces suppressing the personalization of spaces. As in other buildings in Caracas, condominium boards usually establish limits to the ability of residents to project their personal identity outside their apartment. These restrictions are more evident in *Cerro Grande*, where very few traces of personalization are visible. In this building, residents have defined agreements on colors for doors and bars located in the corridors, imprinting a more homogeneous aspect. Residents located at the ends of corridors have appropriated the space in front of their apartment for themselves by putting bars, expanding the territorial limits of their homes. These new places are then populated with plants and furniture. This process of personalization accelerates as more people have been adding bars and replacing the original windows.

Compared to *Cerro Grande*, common areas in *23 de Enero* have a significant amount of personal display because of the lack of regulation by community organizations that allows a variety of interventions in apartment entrances. Another outcome of the improved organizational situation in *Cerro Grande* is the coordination to refurbish areas of the building using collective agreements of display of self. For example, elevator hallways in *Cerro Grande* have been renovated adding new materials colors and plants, which improve the perception of these spaces by neighbors.

Julian Beinart's South African research (mentioned at the outset of this chapter) found similar patterns in the way residents transform physical layouts that both improve

the functionality of their homes and introduce meaning in the otherwise monotonous landscape of government-built housing. In *23 de Enero* there are alterations with similar purposes. Although not carrying any specific cultural meanings such as the Western Native Township investigated by Beinart, *23 de Enero* residents have carried out often drastic changes in the façade of their apartment to stand out from the otherwise monotonous landscape. They have also altered the entrances, in some cases expanding the territory beyond the limits established by the designers of the building.



Figure V-5. Elevator hall in Cerro Grande's 9th floor. Residents of this particular level added materials and plants to improve their perception of this space.



Figure V-6. These residents replaced doors, added materials and changed the layout to distinguish their residences.



Figure V-7. This resident replaced the original layout of windows and the door with a symmetrical one, also adding materials and decorations

V. 1. d. Adaptations for Use

The ecosystem perspective argues that human beings are in a constant process of adaptation, searching for the best fit between people and their environment (Miley et al, 2011, p. 30). The process of adaptation implies an active role of the people involved sometimes affecting the physical environment not only to transmit meaning, as I explained previously, but also to improve the functional characteristics of a place. By developing tactics to improve the performance of the environment, residents actively reveal the gaps or the unfinished aspects of the original design. According to Zeisel (2006), when adapting to the built environment, any resident can assume the role of a designer: "When some people find that their physical environment does not accommodate something they want to do, they change it; they become designers" (p.173). Adaptive traces explicitly demonstrate the tactics that residents employ to improve the environment in order to match their expectations. Zeisel proposes three types of traces within this category: props, connections, and separations (p. 173-174). Props are objects that create new opportunities of use when added to the environment. While connections are changes made to create or emphasize relations between spaces, separations have the opposite purpose: to increase the limits between places. These types of traces proposed by Zeisel add functionality that these transformations allow. To consider the relationship between the proposed changes and the original layout, I include three new categories that provide a framework for the trace types proposed by Zeisel: additions, deletions and retrofitting.



Figure V-8. Cerro Grande back facade. The concentration of props has created a new layer beyond the limits of the original setup. A broken trash chute is visible in this photo.

The most evident tactic deployed by residents using props in both communities is the addition of bars to windows and doors to effectively increase the perception of safety. Security bars and other elements to improve safety are common in Caracas as the result of the expansion of crime and the fear of potential dangers particularly for children. In both *Cerro Grande* and *23 de Enero*, the replacement of windows and the addition of security bars can be considered examples of retrofitting and additions respectively and they have succeeded in negotiating the connections between the apartment and the exterior. These operations have added a new layer to the original façade as they project from the original limits set by the architectural design. The three-dimensional qualities of these elements sometimes permit the display of self, as

residents put plants and added colors to added canopies. Other examples are props used to dry clothes that provide an opportunity for temporary displays of self by adding color to this added layer.

In both case studies, residents have been able to appropriate areas beyond the limits of their apartments in what can be described as a second stage of the added territory trace described in the "displays of self" category. In *Cerro Grande*, the residents at the ends of the hallway have been systematically appropriating the areas in front of their apartments by adding bars to increase the separation. A more extreme case of additions by single residents is found in *23 de Enero* as some spaces have been colonized beyond the limits of apartments including common areas and areas not conceived for human use (figure V-9, figure V-10). Examples of these interventions are when residents expand their apartments over the common hallways, the roof connecting hallways, and the elevator tower. Over time these appropriations are steadily becoming permanent features, thus disfiguring the original architecture with an aggressive set of tactics.



Figure V-9 Residents have built over the roof connecting the elevator tower with the building



Figure V-10. This intervention is considered both an example of territorial expression and an adaptation by separation.

These previous examples of adaptations are focused on individual initiatives from householders, but collectively residents of both communities have also been transforming the physical arrangement to adapt based on common agreements. Although residents of *Cerro Grande* have developed tools to regulate actions of individuals in common areas, the building has, nonetheless, withstood significant changes compared to its original layout. The most evident change is the infilling of the open spaces at ground level, appropriating spaces originally planned for public functions. Although these new spaces at ground level added more functionality to the system, they also affected the overall perception of the building massing by eliminating the open spaces therefore increasing the perception of density. The elevator halls have been enclosed at the ground level as well, and larger spaces have been built to expand the area of the trash huts.



Figure V-11. Covered walkways added by 23 de Enero neighbors to connect staircases to the street

In *23 de Enero*, some neighbors have agreed to improve the common corridors through a concerted, coordinated design but in other areas neighbors have made changes without coordination, affecting common areas on their own. These individual interventions extend from the threshold of the apartment to include whole sections of the corridor. These actions both extend personal territory and allow for more areas of "display of self" and decrease public space by adding devices or props such as security bars (figure V-12). As a result of these actions, the circulation patterns defined in the original design are altered, thus limiting the options for residents to move freely within the building. As a result of the actions of residents, both individual and collective, the original layout of these building has been permanently altered and functions such as the circulation have been reconfigured and even the building envelope has been redefined.

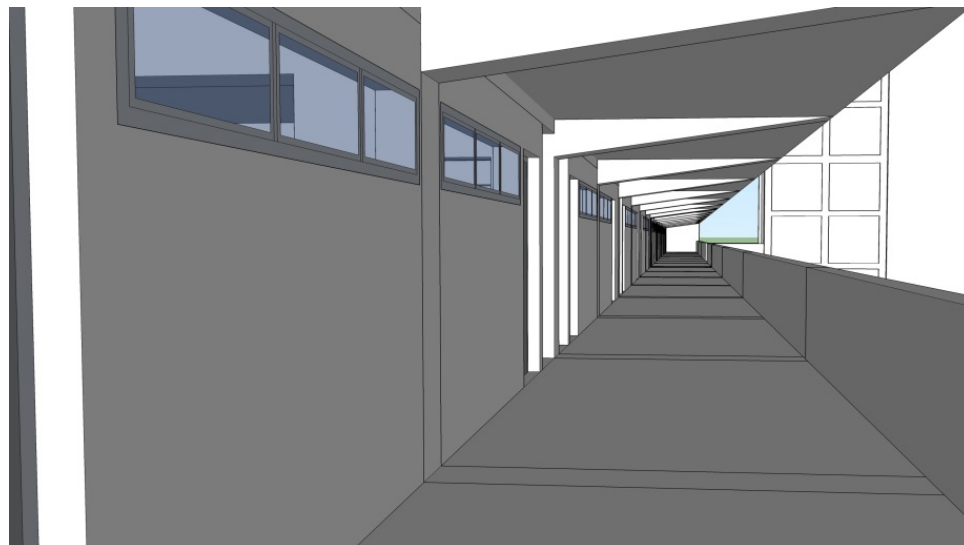


Figure V-12 A group of residents closed a section of the hallway by installing bars and gates. The residents also changed the flooring to personalize and territorialize the corridor.

V. 1. e. Summary of Field Observations on Common Areas of the Buildings

Field Observation Registry #1 *Cerro Grande*

Original Layout



Modified

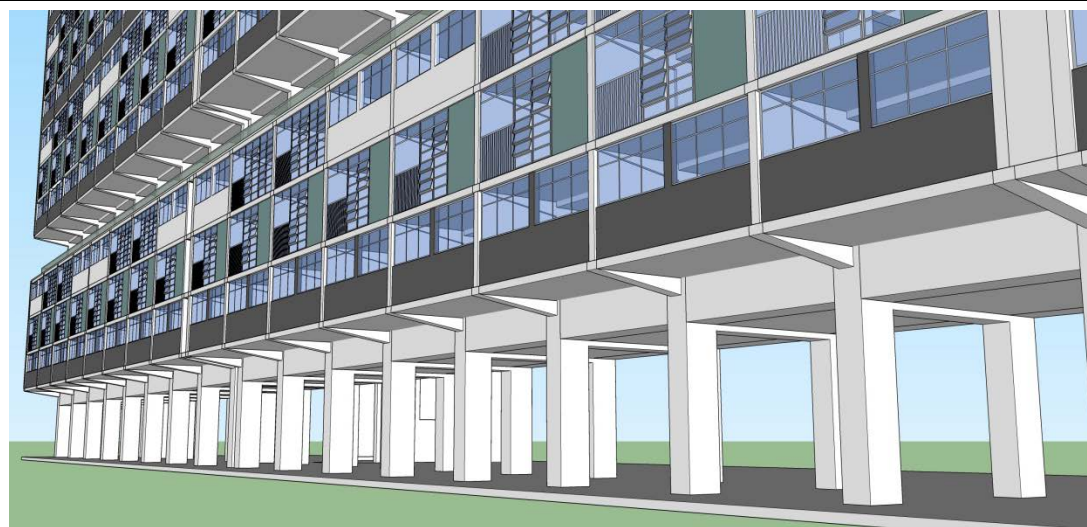


Displays of self: The plants add an opportunity to personalize the entrance to the apartment and to improve the corridor. By placing plants, residents also territorialize the entry space.

Adaptations for use: (props) The bars over doors and windows increase the perception of security and also create a permeable barrier. If the door is open, the bars allow the resident to interact with the activities in the corridor without losing control of the access. In this picture there are two examples of bars: the design on the left allows more plants to be placed, thus adds more opportunities for display of self.

Field Observation Registry #2 *Cerro Grande*

Original Layout



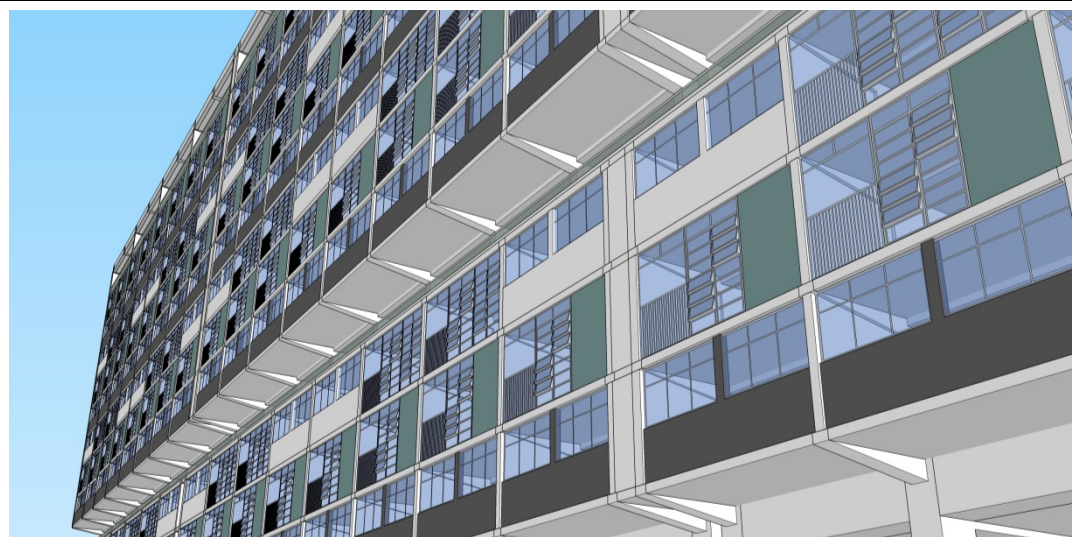
Modified



Adaptations for use: (separations, additions) The building's original open plan (top) is now occupied by a series of spaces for public use (bottom). These areas increase the functionality of the building but altered the visual characteristics of the original design.

Field Observation Registry #3 *Cerro Grande*

Original Layout



Modified



Adaptations for use: (props) Many residents have added bars to the windows to increase safety. Bars are added to address potential burglars and also to prevent children from falling. Other residents have added canopies to mitigate extreme weather conditions. Many residents replaced the original windows as an example of component replacement.

Displays of self: (Personalization) The variety of barricade/gate design allows for personalization, since some models can include plants. The canopies are also varied and allow for the individualization of windows.

Field Observation Registry #4 *23 de Enero*

Original Layout



Modified



Adaptations for use: (props) This resident changed the entire window and door layout from the original design. The addition of bars increases the perception of security and the large size windows increase the connection to the hallway.

Displays of self: (Personalization) The design of the window sill creates a space for plants. The new wood door is an example of component replacement. The paint color is different also from the other residents in this hallway. (Photo source: Carlos Gil)

Field Observation Registry #5 *23 de Enero*

Original Layout



Modified



Adaptations for use: (props and separations) The residents of this building added bars and a door to the common elevator hallway that was originally open.

Displays of self: (Personalization) Besides its functionality, the concrete bars here are also decorative and the colors highlight the entrance. (Photo source: Carlos Gil)

Field Observation Registry #6 *23 de Enero*

Original Layout



Modified



Adaptations for use: (props and separations). Most residents eliminated the ventilation blocks in the kitchens, replacing them with solid walls with windows covered with bars. Many residents also widened the original windows to allow more light and natural ventilation inside the apartment.

Displays of self: (Personalization and component replacement). People added new windows and diverse screen patterns and barriers. (Photo source: Carlos Gil)

V. 2. Physical Changes in the Apartments

In this research, I also include a list of changes to the physical layout of the apartments based on the information collected from residents during the interview process. During the interviews, residents were asked about the changes or renovations made over time and future plans. In addition to the interviews, I also studied real estate websites in Venezuela that show pictures of *23 de Enero* apartments currently on the market. The list of these units is mapped using the apartment floor plans. The findings in this process are organized in three categories: Replacement, addition, and deletion. These categories are considered "adaptations for use" and identify the impact of changes to the physical layout (tactics) made to improve the "fit" between user expectations and the environment. During the interviews, residents of both *Cerro Grande* and *23 de Enero* expressed no significant concerns with their apartments (Chapter VI) and changes inside the apartment from the original layout were not significant. Rather, residents renovated the existing configuration and added new elements to improve the functionality of their apartments. The impacts of these changes are often visible on the façade as "displays of self" or personalization. Overall the majority of residents renovated their kitchens and bathrooms at least one time and predominantly replaced windows and added screens and bars to improve the perception of security. More drastic measures include the integration of split bathrooms, which occurs in both designs and the re-location of doors.

V. 2. a. Cerro Grande

The residents respected the original layout of the apartment and added few alterations. Compared to the 4-bedrooms, the 3-bedroom apartments have undergone

more alterations. Residents of both the 4 and 3-bedrooms created a laundry space inside their apartment, since the original common laundry was closed in the late 1960s. Most residents of the 3-bedroom apartments placed the washing machine in one of three locations: in the hallway to the bedroom on the lower level, next to the bathroom, or inside a closet next to it. Most 4-bedroom residents interviewed included the laundry space in the kitchen except for one resident who repurposed the smaller bathroom to a laundry space. No other major alterations to the apartment layouts are evident in the 4-bedroom units, some residents of the 3-bedroom units relocated the kitchen door that was originally next to the entrance, to the side facing the window which, in their view, improved the natural ventilation.

V. 2. b. 23 de Enero

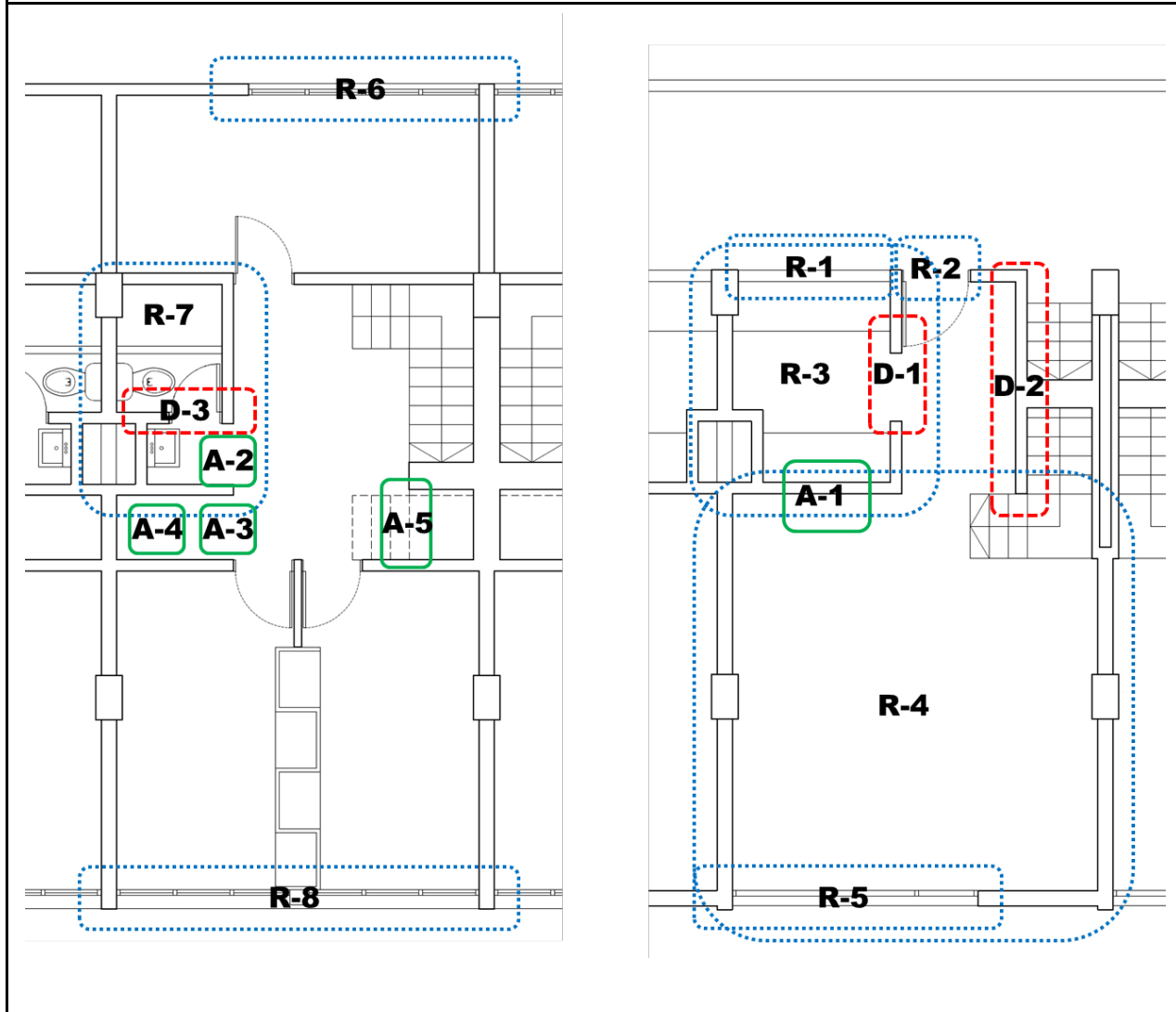
Overall, *23 de Enero* residents employed more aggressive tactics in changing the layout and organization of the apartments compared to residents of *Cerro Grande*. Several characteristics of *23 de Enero* apartments were not appreciated by residents. The ventilation wall in the kitchen was replaced in all apartments surveyed. The architects had located ventilation walls in kitchens that lacked a direct gas supply in order to safely increase natural ventilation. Rather than use gas cylinders, which are prone to leaks. The ventilation blocks are also a common feature in traditional architecture and Villanueva often used them. However, residents modified this wall by filling in the holes and then by opening a hole for a conventional window. The gray terrazzo flooring used in *23 de Enero* is also of lower quality compared to the one used in *Cerro Grande*. Many residents replaced it with ceramic tiles or linoleum. Although all residents renovated their kitchens and bathrooms, most chose to keep the functional

bathroom design that split the sink and shower from the toilet. Many residents rebuilt the original windows to either increase or reduce the relationship to the exterior.



Figure V-13 Different interiors of 23 de Enero apartments as shown in a real-estate website

Table V 2 Cerro Grande Apartments (3-bedrooms). Account of Changes

**Replacement**

R-1 Kitchen window, addition of bars/screens
 R-2 Addition of bars/screens
 R-3 Kitchen renovation, floor, walls and counters
 R-4 New Flooring (tiles)
 R-5 New windows and bars
 R-6 New window, steel plate, walls.
 R-7 Bathroom renovation
 R-8 New windows

Additions

A-1 Kitchen door facing the windows
 A-2 Bathroom door
 A-3 Deposit door
 A-4 Laundry area
 A-5 Laundry area

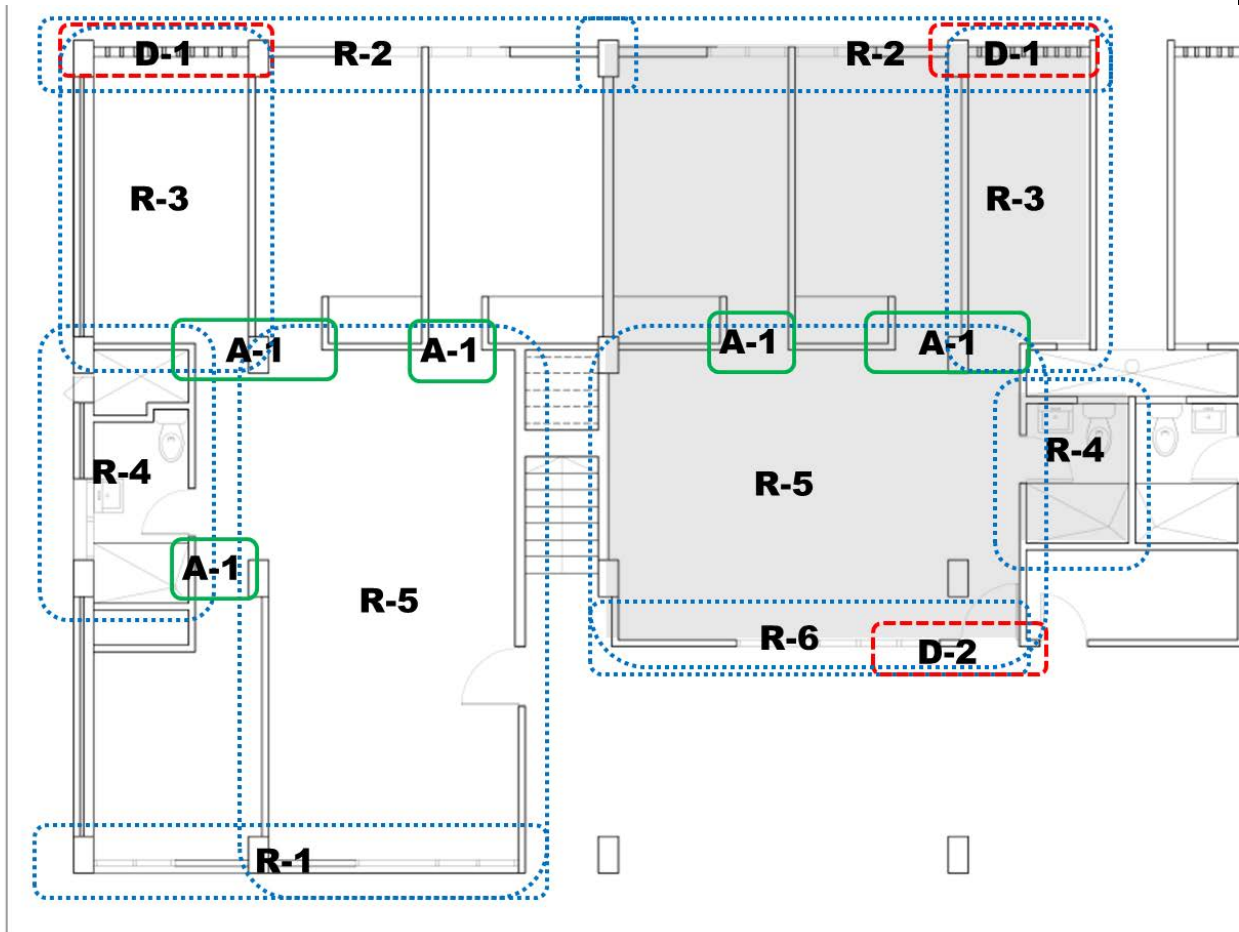
Demolitions

D-1 Kitchen door
 D-2 Screen next to the staircase
 D-3 Toilet-shower door (Bathroom integration)

Table V 3 Cerro Grande Apartments (4-bedrooms). Account of Changes

<p>Replacement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> R-1 Kitchen window, addition of bars R-2 Addition of bars R-3 Kitchen renovation, floor, walls and counters R-4 New Flooring (tiles) R-5 New windows and bars R-6 New window, steel plate, walls. R-7 Bathroom renovation R-8 New windows 	<p>Additions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A-1 Kitchen door facing the windows A-2 Bathroom door A-3 Deposit door A-4 Laundry area A-5 Laundry area <p>Demolitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> D-1 Kitchen door D-2 Screen next to the staircase D-3 Toilet-shower door (Bathroom integration)

Table V.4 23 de Enero Apartments (3-bedrooms and 2-bedrooms). Account of Changes



Replacement

R-1 Addition of new windows and bars
 R-2 Addition of new windows and bars
 R-3 Kitchen renovation, floor, walls and counters
 R-4 Bathroom renovation
 R-5 New flooring over the original terrazzo

Additions

A-1 Doors (originally not included)

Deletions

D-1 Ventilation wall
 D-2 Door and windows facing the hallway

The field observation process provides a framework to understand the tactics used by residents to transform the physical arrangement of their apartments. As in earlier precedents in South Africa and Pessac, the transformation of the original layout accounts for the active role of residents and their agency in improving their living conditions. This physical evidence accounts for the additions, deletions, and retrofitting made by residents in the process of adaptation, sometimes challenging the initial assumptions of residents. The changes to the original layout are more dramatic in *23 de Enero* as individual initiatives had fewer restrictions. In *Cerro Grande*, a strong community organization has contained the impact of changes made by individuals in the common spaces. In both cases, apartments have been thoroughly renovated with more aggressive tactics used in *23 de Enero*. The repetitive pattern of equal windows and ventilation walls in *23 de Enero* has been altered dramatically by the deletion, addition and retrofitting of the modular units. In *Cerro Grande*, the initial façade layout allowed for some irregularities so the effect of the additions is not as dramatic as in *23 de Enero*. The lack of evidence of everyday activities in the common spaces and communal areas in both cases is worth noting and contributes to the discussion about the prevalence of the building with communal facilities (*Cerro Grande*) over the simplified *superbloque*. Although there are similarities in both case studies, the field observation process has provided two different narratives in the development of tactics to transform the physical layout and configuration.

Table V.5 Field Observations. Summary of findings				
	By Products of use	Adaptations of use	Displays of self	Public Message
Apartment	N/A	Changes in kitchen door, Addition of laundry space Integration of split bathroom Change of flooring Replacement of Windows Replacement of ventilation walls Addition of bars and screens in doors and windows	Change of doors Personalized bars and canopies Plants in the façade	N/A
Building	Erosion: Addition of trash chutes Missing traces: No evidence of intensive use in common areas,	New windows Enclosure of elevator halls Enclosure of public circulation to create semi private spaces Addition of new enclosed spaces (<i>Cerro Grande</i>) Residents invading areas not conceived for use (23E)	Addition of plants close to the entrances of the building Territorial extension using bars and screens. Change of colors and materials in apartments facades to the hallways (23E)	Murals with political content (23E) Murals of social organizations (23E) Graffiti

VI. Chapter Six: The Resident's Perspective

In addition to the list of evidence in the physical configuration, I conducted in-depth interviews with present-day residents of *superbloques* to discern the tactics they used. According to Zeisel (2006), focused interviews are useful “to find out in depth how people define a concrete situation, what they consider important about it, what effects they intend their actions to have on the situation, and how they feel about it” (p.227). Focused interviews are one of the most powerful tools of qualitative inquiry since it opens the user to the observation of the researcher. The type of interview developed in this research used open-ended questions to further increase this advantage. Zeisel also reflects on probes, which are the primary tools used by researchers during interviews. My knowledge of the language, etiquette, and idioms, allowed me to connect well with residents while doing the interviews. The design of the questionnaire is based on field observations and informal conversations with residents of *Cerro Grande* in March 2012. All the interviews were conducted by phone using a referral sampling method that started with one resident in each community. The interviews have been transcribed and translated into English and are available in the appendix to this document (Appendix 2).

VI. 1. Interview Structure

The interviews were conducted by phone between June 2014 and September 2014. Using the referral or snowballing sample method, fourteen respondents were located in *Cerro Grande* and nine in *23 de Enero*. Eight of the nine respondents at the *23 de Enero* complex were from the second phase known by residents as *La Cañada de la Iglesia* (The Church's Creek). This sector has five simple blocks of 150 apartments each and a double block of 300. Only one respondent is located in a different sector

Sierra Maestra which is also within the limits of the second phase but more embedded with the informal settlements. The snowballing sampling process was conducted until the saturation point was reached. In both case studies the interviewees provided a considerable amount of information about the four main topics of discussion related to the different ecosystems analyzed (apartment, building, community, and context) and provided additional testimonies and suggestions. I considered that saturation was reached when residents were not able to add new information to the existing codes.

The text of the interviews is coded (Table VI.1) following a criteria based on the ecosystem perspective described in the theoretical section (chapter 2). The perception codes are organized in four groups: apartment, building, community, and context. The perception of changes over time and the challenges are organized in two different code groups. The findings of the interview process are organized in the same way. I use the *NVivo* software tools such as the word cloud and graphics to visualize the results.

Table VI.1 Coding Organization		
Apartment	Perception	Positive Negative Neutral
Building	Perception	Positive Negative Neutral
Context	Perception	Positive Negative Neutral
Community	Perception	Positive Negative Neutral
Perception of changes over time		Positive Negative
Challenges		Crime
		Community
		Utilities
		Parking
		Maintenance
		Trash disposal
		Changes to original structure

VI. 1. a. Profile of the Residents Interviewed in both case studies

The following tables describe the profile of the residents interviewed in both case studies. Homeownership is an aspect that was considered crucial in the early stages of this research. However, the current restriction of the rental market in Venezuela set in

place by the government in the last 10 years have resulted in a severe decrease of renters in Caracas and other cities. None of the respondents contacted for this interview identified as a renter and, only in two cases, I found that two households shared an apartment, and in both cases, they were siblings living together with their respective families.

Table VI.2 Profile of Residents Interviewed (I). Gender and Age Groups													
<p>Gender groups The referral process in <i>Cerro Grande</i> produced exclusively female householders as respondents. While the respondents in <i>23 de Enero</i> are a balanced group from both genders.</p>	<p>Gender groups</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Gender Distribution Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Gender</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>M</td> <td>~3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>F</td> <td>~11</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Gender	Count	M	~3	F	~11						
Gender	Count												
M	~3												
F	~11												
<p>Age groups In terms of age, the age group of 45 and more predominate, which was positive during the process as most people were able to tell stories about changes over time</p>	<p>Age groups</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Age Group Distribution Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Age Group</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>61+</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>46-60</td> <td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>35-45</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>26-35</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>18-25</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age Group	Count	61+	6	46-60	11	35-45	4	26-35	1	18-25	1
Age Group	Count												
61+	6												
46-60	11												
35-45	4												
26-35	1												
18-25	1												

Table VI.3 Profile of Residents Interviewed (II). Building and Apartment Groups


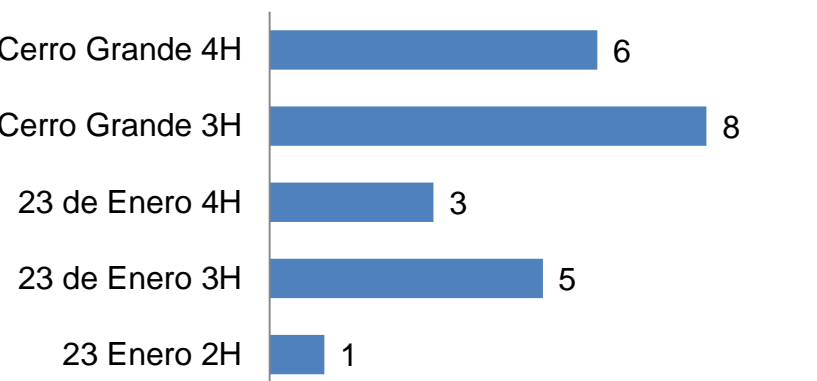
<p>Building The referral process worked more effectively in <i>Cerro Grande</i> with multiple residents contacted by the gatekeeper willing to participate. A different scenario occurred in <i>23 de Enero</i> where the recruiting of respondents was slower and more difficult. However, the final amount of text obtained from both buildings is very similar.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Building groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Building Group</th> <th>Number of Residents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>CG</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>23E</td> <td>9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Building Group	Number of Residents	CG	14	23E	9						
Building Group	Number of Residents												
CG	14												
23E	9												
<p>Apartment type There is a balanced representation of 3-bedroom (A) and 4-bedroom (B) apartments in <i>Cerro Grande</i>. <i>23 de Enero</i> apartments represented in the sample also have a similar distribution. The resident of the 2 bedroom apartments provided insights about living next to the hallway.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Apartment type groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Apartment Type Group</th> <th>Number of Residents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Cerro Grande 4H</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cerro Grande 3H</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>23 de Enero 4H</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>23 de Enero 3H</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>23 Enero 2H</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Apartment Type Group	Number of Residents	Cerro Grande 4H	6	Cerro Grande 3H	8	23 de Enero 4H	3	23 de Enero 3H	5	23 Enero 2H	1
Apartment Type Group	Number of Residents												
Cerro Grande 4H	6												
Cerro Grande 3H	8												
23 de Enero 4H	3												
23 de Enero 3H	5												
23 Enero 2H	1												

Table VI.4 Profile of Residents Interviewed (III). Employment, Education, and Household size Groups

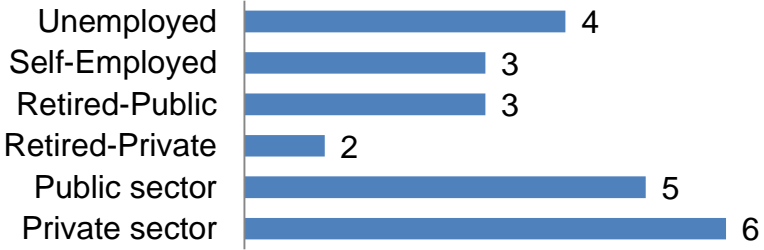
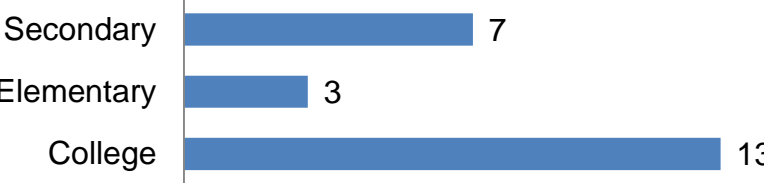
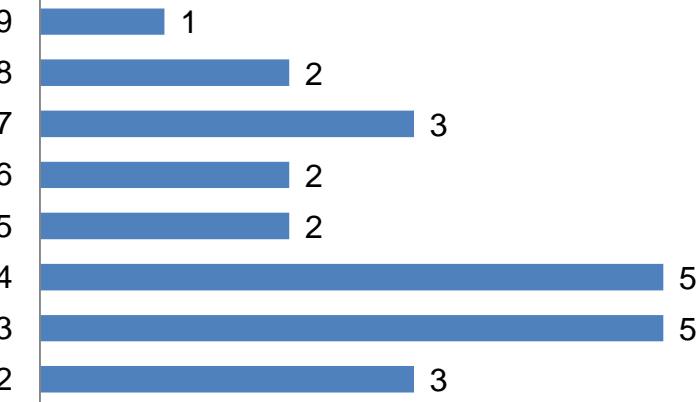

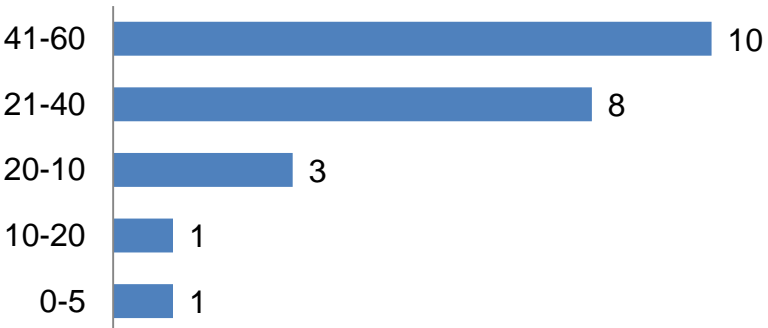
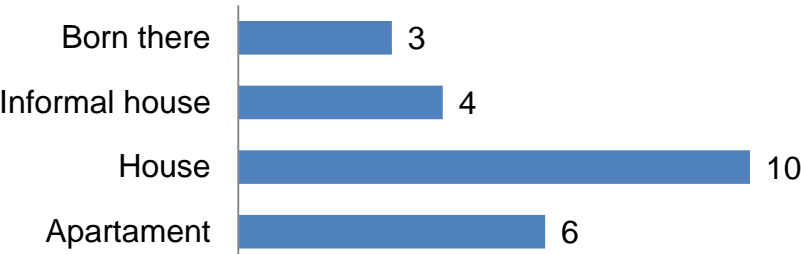

<p>Employment There is a balanced representation of people working or retired in both public and private sectors and they amount to 80 per cent of respondents. Self-employed and unemployed respondents are also represented.</p> <p>Education More than half of the residents interviewed are College educated. And all respondents have levels of education. This represents an improvement of the situation compared to 1959 as the CINVA report found higher levels of illiteracy at that moment.</p> <p>Household size 15 of respondents have a household size between two and five and only three households have 7- and - person households. The CINVA report found an avg. household size of 7.7 in 1959.</p> <p>Children Only nine apartments have children in the household. These respondents were questioned about the challenges of raising children in these buildings.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Employment groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Group</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Unemployed</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Self-Employed</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Retired-Public</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Retired-Private</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Public sector</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private sector</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Group	Count	Unemployed	4	Self-Employed	3	Retired-Public	3	Retired-Private	2	Public sector	5	Private sector	6			
Group	Count																	
Unemployed	4																	
Self-Employed	3																	
Retired-Public	3																	
Retired-Private	2																	
Public sector	5																	
Private sector	6																	
<p style="text-align: center;">Education groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Group</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Secondary</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Elementary</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>College</td> <td>13</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Group	Count	Secondary	7	Elementary	3	College	13										
Group	Count																	
Secondary	7																	
Elementary	3																	
College	13																	
<p style="text-align: center;">Household size groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Household Size</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>9</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Household Size	Count	9	1	8	2	7	3	6	2	5	2	4	5	3	5	2	3
Household Size	Count																	
9	1																	
8	2																	
7	3																	
6	2																	
5	2																	
4	5																	
3	5																	
2	3																	
<p style="text-align: center;">Children groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>YES</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NO</td> <td>14</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Count	YES	9	NO	14												
Response	Count																	
YES	9																	
NO	14																	

Table VI.5 Profile of Residents Interviewed (IV). Arrival and Previous Housing Groups

<p>Arrival 65% of the resident interviewed arrived to their building within the first 20 years of their construction. Four residents moved into their apartments in the last 20 years</p> <p>Previous Housing The majority of residents interviewed lived in single-family houses prior to moving to the <i>superbloques</i>. 4 residents moved to the <i>superbloque</i> from informal houses (IH) and 3 residents were born in the same building.</p> <p>Coming from the countryside Only six residents came to these buildings from places other than Caracas, contrasting with the 66% reported by Carlson in 1959.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Years living in the building groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Years living in the building groups</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>41-60</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>21-40</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20-10</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10-20</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0-5</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Years living in the building groups	Count	41-60	10	21-40	8	20-10	3	10-20	1	0-5	1
	Years living in the building groups	Count											
	41-60	10											
21-40	8												
20-10	3												
10-20	1												
0-5	1												
<p style="text-align: center;">Previous housing groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Previous housing groups</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Born there</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Informal house</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>House</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Apartament</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Previous housing groups	Count	Born there	3	Informal house	4	House	10	Apartament	6			
Previous housing groups	Count												
Born there	3												
Informal house	4												
House	10												
Apartament	6												
<p style="text-align: center;">Coming from outside Caracas groups</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Coming from outside Caracas groups</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>YES</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NO</td> <td>15</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Coming from outside Caracas groups	Count	YES	8	NO	15							
Coming from outside Caracas groups	Count												
YES	8												
NO	15												

VI. 2. Perception of the Apartment

In both projects, the perception of the apartment is predominantly positive and people praised the spaciousness, daylighting, and natural ventilation. Many respondents compared these features with similar apartments in Caracas noting how they feel privileged to have such a large apartment while their relatives and friends are coping with smaller apartments in comparable neighborhoods or new developments. Even a resident living in the smaller units of this study praised its spaciousness: “compared to contemporary apartments, my 62 square-meter apartment looks very spacious with very comfortable rooms” (23E-5). The words comfortable, big, spacious, well-lit, well-ventilated, well-distributed were used very often by residents when describing their apartments.



Figure VI-1 Apartment perception word cloud

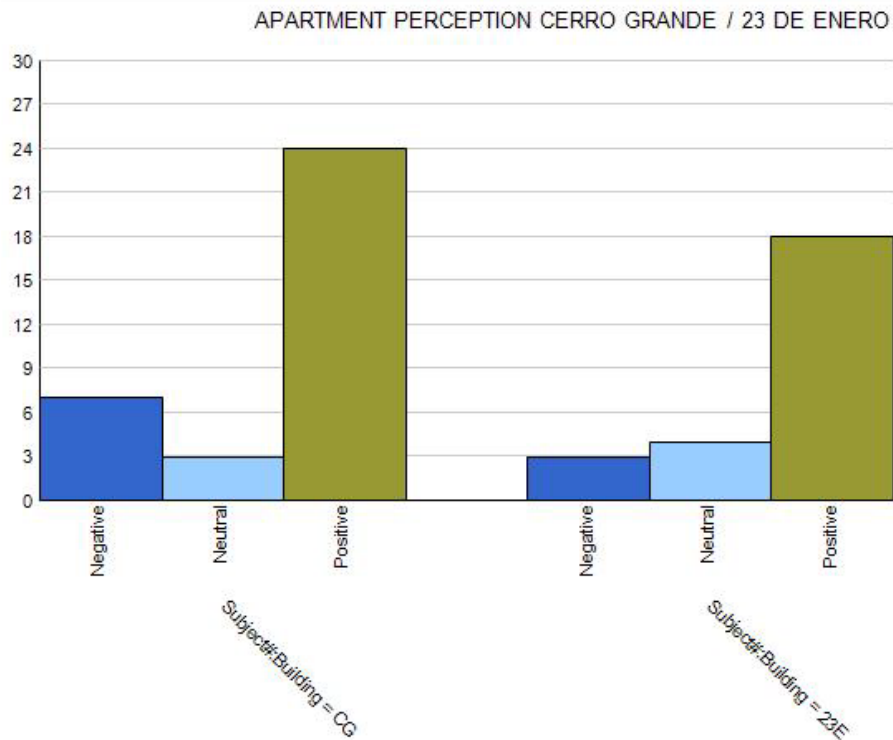


Figure VI-2 Apartment perception coding count

VI. 2. a. Cerro Grande: Apartment Perception

Many respondents living in the 3-bedroom apartments of *Cerro Grande* praised the two-story layout as positive because it clearly separates the social areas on the upper floor from the private areas on the lower level. Two residents commented on this aspect: “I like the privacy of the apartment layout because I can receive visitors on the upper level without disturbing the bedrooms on the lower level” (CG-6). “I like that the apartments are big, two-story, the social and private areas are separated. I like that very much” (CG-12). As a consequence of geographical conditions, the housing stock in Caracas is composed mostly of apartments, thus houses are considered upscale. *Cerro Grande* residents seem to perceive the staircase as an icon of a larger house or a *quinta* (a popular term in Caracas to describe upper-scale single residences). Two of the respondents compared their apartment to a house; one of them mentioned the

project of “*quintas aereas*” (air *quintas*) a relatively famous residential building in Caracas developed also in the 1950s by the private sector, which also used the two-story layout in apartments. People living in upper levels of the building mentioned the views to the city as a positive feature. Other positive aspects mentioned are the number of bedrooms, the size of the windows, and the storage space.

There were few complaints as most people think that the positive features largely outweigh the negatives. The major source of complaints is the stairs within the units are difficult for older residents who live in the two-story apartments. One resident in the 61+ age group mentioned: “I would like to move to a house because I am struggling with the stairs (CG-4)”. Two other residents mentioned the same issue, which also affects senior residents living in the 4-bedroom apartment because they use a staircase to access the apartment from the hallway. One resident mentioned how the clear separation between social and private spaces is broken when a visitor uses the restroom on the lower level and another resident mentioned the need for an extra bathroom. Most residents appreciated the large windows and the amount of daylight they provided, although complained of the cost of replacing them. More specific complaints dealt with the lack of natural ventilation in the bathroom and the dependence on a defective mechanical ventilation system. A resident mentioned that the dimensions of the kitchen are not generous. Except for the stair issue mentioned by senior residents, none of the other complaints were mentioned by more than one resident.

VI. 2. b. 23 de Enero: Apartment Perception

Apartments in *23 de Enero* are larger, even compared to similar buildings on private estates. The apartment is comfortable because it is spacious. I

have good views to the city and its valley. It is well ventilated and we do not need an air conditioner (23E-9).

Residents in *23 de Enero* mention the qualities of spaciousness and natural ventilation more often than *Cerro Grande* residents. Overall in the description of the apartment, *23 de Enero* residents emphasize measurable qualities such as dimensions, natural ventilation and materiality over qualitative descriptors: “The apartment has good natural ventilation. The windows are large and we have a great geographic location and orientation” (23E-8). “It is well ventilated, when I open my bedroom door, air flows all over; it is well lit too” (23E-6). Besides the overall spaciousness, natural ventilation and amount of daylight, residents of the Modular *Diego de Losada* mentioned positively the size of the kitchen: “The kitchen has the same dimensions as a bedroom, it is quite big” (23E-5). A resident living on the second level considered avoiding the use of the elevator as an advantage.

There were very few negative aspects mentioned by the residents and all of them varied according to the apartment type. One resident living in the 2-bedroom apartment facing the hallway complained about its limited area compared to the ample hallway. Two residents mentioned the need for an extra-bathroom: “At some point we were 10 living here when all my seven children lived here” (23E-2). There was a mention about the dimension of the bedrooms in terms of how all bedrooms were different. And two residents think the kitchen could be bigger.

The positive perception of the apartment layout and environment is a good indicator of the qualities of the design implemented by Villanueva and his team. The location of windows on opposite sides of the apartment guarantees airflow and

eliminates the need to use the air conditioner. The apartment layout also allows residents to introduce modifications that improved the overall perception.

VI. 3. Perception of the Building

Similar to the analysis of the perception of the apartments, the positive aspects outscored the negatives in both building types. However, in *Cerro Grande*, residents were more enthusiastic about their buildings and mentioned positive aspects more often than *23 de Enero* residents; they also mentioned fewer negative features. Residents in both buildings showed awareness of the importance of the buildings in the history of the city and knew about the circumstances surrounding the buildings' inception. In describing the positives, residents emphasized the qualities of the physical layout, often describing the qualities of the structure. Residents of *23 de Enero* emphasized how the building layout fosters community life, while residents of *Cerro Grande* emphasized the durability of the construction.



Figure VI-3 Building perception word cloud

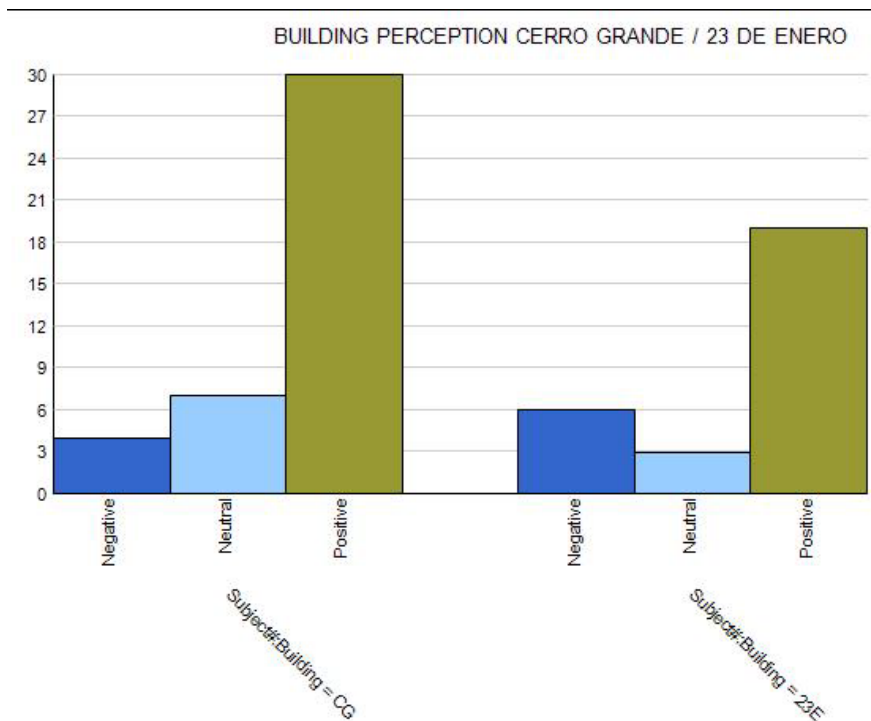


Figure VI-4 Building perception coding count

VI. 3. a. Cerro Grande: Building Perception

Cerro Grande residents gave very positive reviews about the building, focusing on the qualities of the spatial layout and the structural soundness and what they considered an advanced design: “The building was well-designed and is a great architectural work. At that time was wonderful, extremely modern” (CG-5). “The structure is spectacular, is contemporary, generous, open with a great panoramic view” (CG-7). A resident mentioned how the building was related to the idea of progress in the time it was built: “We were given an option to buy a house in *Coche* (a housing development of single-story houses) but my mom wanted to live in an apartment, my mother-in-law too. It was considered part of the ideal of progress” (CG-8). Many residents were able to provide testimonies that trace the evolution of the building from its inception, showing emotional attachment. Some residents identified the qualities of

the common spaces, including the communal areas: “I think the best features are the apartments and the corridors. Here the corridor is a recreational area” (CG-6). “What I like the most in the building is the terrace because I think it is a unique feature” (CG-7). The qualities of the corridors and their dimensions were mentioned several times. One resident (CG-6) recounted how a neighbor used to organize movie projections by placing a screen on the hillside. The residents used the corridors as a vantage point to watch the film.

There were very few negative comments, and almost all of them were related to the effects of the aging infrastructure such as the pervasive leaks and broken pipes and the condition of the trash chutes. Other residents mentioned challenges related to the building maintenance and finally, the lack of designated parking spaces in the original design.

VI. 3. b. 23 de Enero: Building Perception

Like *Cerro Grande*, many residents in *23 de Enero* emphasized the qualities of the building over the negative aspects. While *Cerro Grande* residents described the qualities more in terms of design, *23 de Enero* residents describe their building more in terms of durability and resilience. They were also able to trace the history of the buildings, and define their uniqueness compared to similar buildings. Many *23 de Enero* residents describe positively how the circulation pattern increased community interaction: “Since there are three corridors we have a lot of opportunities to interact. The fact that we see each other in the elevator increases the sense of community” (23E-1). “Here, the building layout stimulates more interactions among neighbors. That could be beneficial or not, but when there is a good coexistence, it is enjoyable” (23E-

4). Like *Cerro Grande* residents, respondents in *23 de Enero* also mentioned the ample corridors and the unusual layout of staircases as positive features, because of the many alternatives available to navigate the building.

On the negative side, the results are similar to *Cerro Grande* with many residents mentioning issues related to the aging structure and challenges related to the building maintenance. "I would say that it is old, so it sometimes has issues related to that such as leakages, power outages and so on" (23E-9). Other residents mentioned problems with the trash chutes in the past; fortunately, the municipal government replaced them recently. The lack of negative reviews in both building types could be influenced by the overall awareness of the historical value of these structures.

VI. 4. Perception of the Community

On the topic of community there is also a predominance of positive comments in the interviews in both cases, however, *Cerro Grande* residents gave a more balanced vision between positives and negatives compared to their counterparts in *23 de Enero*. Overall people in *23 de Enero* gave strong positive descriptions of the community compared to *Cerro Grande* residents. On the negative side, both groups of residents mention the lack of community involvement. Overall, community processes in *23 de Enero* are more related to everyday interactions whereas in *Cerro Grande* they are related to the actions of the community organizations such as the condominium board. Although there are problems related to crime surrounding these communities and sometimes inside them, in both cases people mentioned a strong sense of personal security when they are inside the building; however, none of the people I interviewed with children allowed them play unsupervised in the common areas.

about activities all also always among any apartments areas away bad barrio **because**
been between board **building** care changes charge children **christmas**
 colectivos common communal **community** compared **condo** conflicts contribute
 council councils **day** december decorate decorates decorations differences different doors during
each enero even **events** experience family **feel** floor fourth from gather get going **good**
 government group hallways has **have here** holidays including kids know
 level **like** lot many more mother moved **neighbors** new organize
 organized **other** our parties **people** put safe see since
some something than them time try values very way were when which year years **you**
 your

Figure VI-5 Community perception word cloud

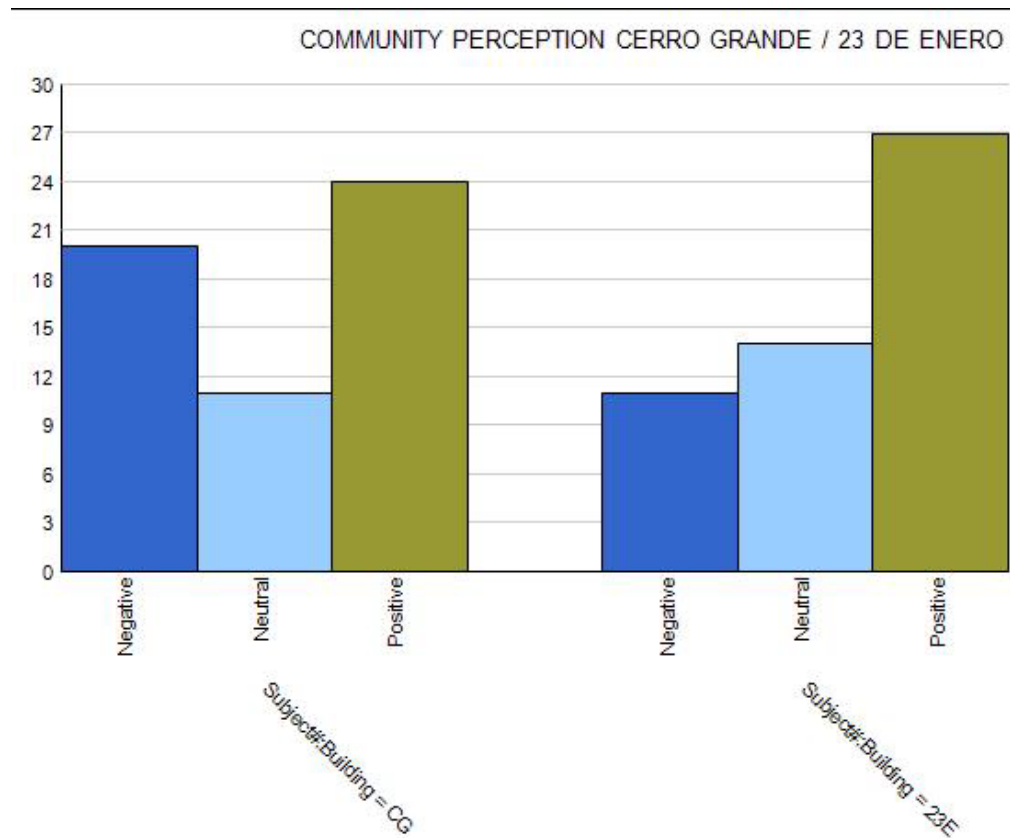


Figure VI-6 Community perception coding count

VI. 4. a. Cerro Grande: Community Perception

Cerro Grande residents value the familiarity among members of the community, particularly those who have been living in the building for a long period: “We are more than a community, we are a family. People do care for each other here, particularly the senior residents” (CG-1). Residents mention the prevalence of what they call the original values of the community, defined by respect and solidarity. Some people feel that these values could be undermined by new generations of residents. There are a lot of mentions of the condominium board as an important center to organize community activities. According to residents, the condominium board plays an important role mediating the life of residents, organizing events and administering the common areas of the building. One of the members of the board explains these activities:

At Christmas time, we often had real good years. Some years we encouraged people to decorate their doors. We organized *parrandas* (a band playing traditional Christmas music). One of our neighbors is a singer and after December 15 we organize *parrandas* with him. As for Mother’s Day, we have had events so many times on the 4th floor; we once brought mariachi and boleros. Those events were possible with the contribution of residents and the condominium (CG-6).

Recently, the work of the condominium board has been complemented by the Communal Council, which are organizations promoted by the government to facilitate actions between the executive power and the communities. The areas of influence of Communal Councils sometimes overlap with existing organizations allowing the government to directly fund projects that make a real impact in the community. However, they have been criticized for their excessive politicization in favor of the government. In *Cerro Grande*, the Communal Council was able to renovate one of the

elevators and is looking for ways to integrate *Cerro Grande* with its surrounding communities, as one of the members mentioned: “Since we are going to a communal system, all sectors should work together. We work together with the 19 de Abril and 5 de Julio sectors, they are behind the building. I talk to people in these sectors and we share the same problems such as dirty streets and water problems because we are served by the same pipe” (CG-7).

An example of positive community action is the common effort invested by a considerable group of residents some 30 years ago to organize a parking lot in one of the empty lots near the building. This parking lot currently holds 50 spots for a group of residents who have organized themselves to transfer these parking spots.

Unfortunately, not all the residents have access to this parking lot, therefore, increasing the pressure for parking spaces in the area and making very difficult for visitors to find parking spaces nearby.

On the negative side, *Cerro Grande* residents mention problems related to neighbors with bad behavior that spans from impoliteness and noise to issues related to alcohol, drugs, and violence. Some residents mentioned that the stairways, that have very low traffic and lack daylight are hotbeds for drug trafficking and consumption. They blame these issues on the lack of supervision of young adults by their parents. Other issues are related to the lack of participation in common projects including the expenses incurred for the maintenance of the building: A neighbor complained about this: “The deterioration has increased because many people do not contribute to the common expenses. There are people who do not have the mentality to live in condominiums” (CG-5). Other complaints are related to the lack of amenities for kids and the fact that

residents do not feel that the building community is a safe environment. One of the parents interviewed mentioned: “My son does not have any friends in the building. Kids have to be kept locked at home. Playing in the hallways was prohibited a long time ago because hallways are the ceilings of the bedrooms” (CG-13). Another resident added: “My son is 14 years old and he barely interacts with anybody in this building. His high school is in another area of the city” (CG-14).

One of the aspects related to community life that I inquired about in *Cerro Grande* was the use of the common facilities, the open fourth floor and the terrace. The access to these areas is restricted, particularly the terrace. The fourth floor is used by the community as an event space under the supervision of the condominium board. According to some testimonies, the 4th floor space had been open to residents earlier, but it was restricted after a series of incidents. Apparently, activities on the fourth floor affect neighbors living on the third floor 4-bedroom apartments so they limited these events to avoid noise late at night. According to the condominium board’s members, the space is used for children parties, and other scheduled activities such as meetings, dance therapy, and aerobics. They charge a fee to cover expenses and fund the condominium. There are concerns about the use of the floor space for children as this parent mentioned: “The fourth floor is used for children parties and I have been at two of them with my kids but I am scared because I think the railing is insecure for kids” (CG-9).

VI. 4. b. 23 de Enero: Community Perception

At *23 de Enero* there were more elaborated responses on the topic of community with fewer references to organizations such as the condominium board or the

Communal Council. Almost all residents interviewed live in “*La Cañada*” which is part of the second stage of *23 de Enero*'s master plan. All residents mentioned the positive environment of this sector compared to other areas in *23 de Enero*. Many residents mentioned the sense of community as one of the sources of identity for residents. A longtime resident of the complex described it in this way:

Community defines life in *23 de Enero*. We have achieved a balance between our differences. Here you find a criminal, a professional, a student, but we all coexist. Solidarity is at its highest here. There is a strong sense of community and individual values are not as important. I like to compare it with our native Venezuelan communities; this is like a *Shabono* (an indigenous building form of collective house), where some neighbors have an open-door policy so people can stop by and chat, have a coffee and so on. That is something that I have not seen outside *23 de Enero*, including the many places in which I have lived. There is this concept of “mutual protection (23E-1).

When considering the community values that are embedded in *23 de Enero*, residents mention communication, respect, protection, solidarity and pride. There is also a sense of identity built upon the idea of the uniqueness of *23 de Enero* in the city of Caracas, the idea of a city within a city. A resident explained this phenomenon in this way: “Here people always feel safe about speaking their mind and protesting and that might have been defining our identity to the rest of the city” (CG-1). Certainly, *23 de Enero* is considered a differentiated district within Caracas known for its own social organization and also for being a disputatious community that traditionally challenges the order imposed by the authorities in the pre-Chavez era. Another resident gave a complete assessment of this situation from a historical perspective:

This is a community with an embedded revolutionary psyche, which has been evolving since Perez Jimenez until the present political situation. This is often an inconvenience because people assume a defensive attitude. In *23 de Enero* a love/hate duality in the way people relate to each other exists; on the one hand, there might be conflicts between people but on the other hand, we are very supportive. This is like a tribe; if an outsider has a conflict with somebody all the members will defend their own no matter what. This is something present at all organizational levels in *23 de Enero*. We always feel like a group, even if conflicts arise between different sectors within *23 de Enero* (23E-8).

During holidays there are also activities that contribute to the improvement of community life, as this resident explains: “During holidays such as Christmas or Mother’s Day there are events with music. Groups of people are in charge of organizing these activities. The library is in charge of organizing traditional holidays such as *Cruz de Mayo* and *La Paradura del Niño* with a good turnout” (CG-4). Unlike *Cerro Grande* where the organization and logistics of these events is led by the condominium board, in *23 de Enero* there is a more complex network of community organizations. The condominium boards exist but there is also the *colectivos* and the communal councils. *Colectivos* are social organizations that have taken control of security and other functions related to public safety as the police left the community in the early 2000. *Colectivos* are strongholds of the executive power in *23 de Enero* and they play a strategic role in keeping order in what is considered the backyard of *Miraflores*, the government palace located close to *23 de Enero*. *Colectivos* are also in charge of organizing events during holidays and other dates considered important in the community.

On the negative side an aspect often mentioned by residents is the lack of community involvement. One of the residents, who organizes cultural activities and is a former resident of the informal *barrios* within *23 de Enero* compared the community involvement in the building and the *barrio*:

I organize activities with the building's community and it is difficult to have a good turnout as people prefer not to get involved. While in the *Barrio*, people interact more and you see people hanging out in the street and talking to each other, in the building people are more reclusive. There is not a significant participation in the community, including in the condominium board meetings (23E-3).

Other negative aspects mentioned included the lack of education and awareness about the value of the infrastructure. Trash disposal is considered an issue not because there is no infrastructure or collection but because people litter on common areas and public spaces. For most people, this is a community problem rather than a building one: "There are issues implementing regulations and keeping the building clean" (23E-4). Other residents had similar approaches to the problem of cleanliness in common areas, which also include people not cleaning up after their pets. Residents also mentioned the negative impact of crime on everyday life and the lack of a safe environment for children. However, most respondents considered that many of these issues have been recently alleviated.

VI. 5. Perception of the Context

The context is perceived very differently in each community. While people in *23 de Enero* have an overall positive perception, residents of *Cerro Grande* have a strong negative view of the neighborhood especially the proximity of the *barrios*. These site

conditions affect the perception in this case because residents of *23 de Enero* understand their context as part of their identity while *Cerro Grande* residents perceive the context as an alien force against them. Most *23 de Enero* residents seem to have accepted the existence of the barrios as part of a symbiotic process, while *Cerro Grande* residents confront their presence with anxiety.



Figure VI-7 Context perception word cloud

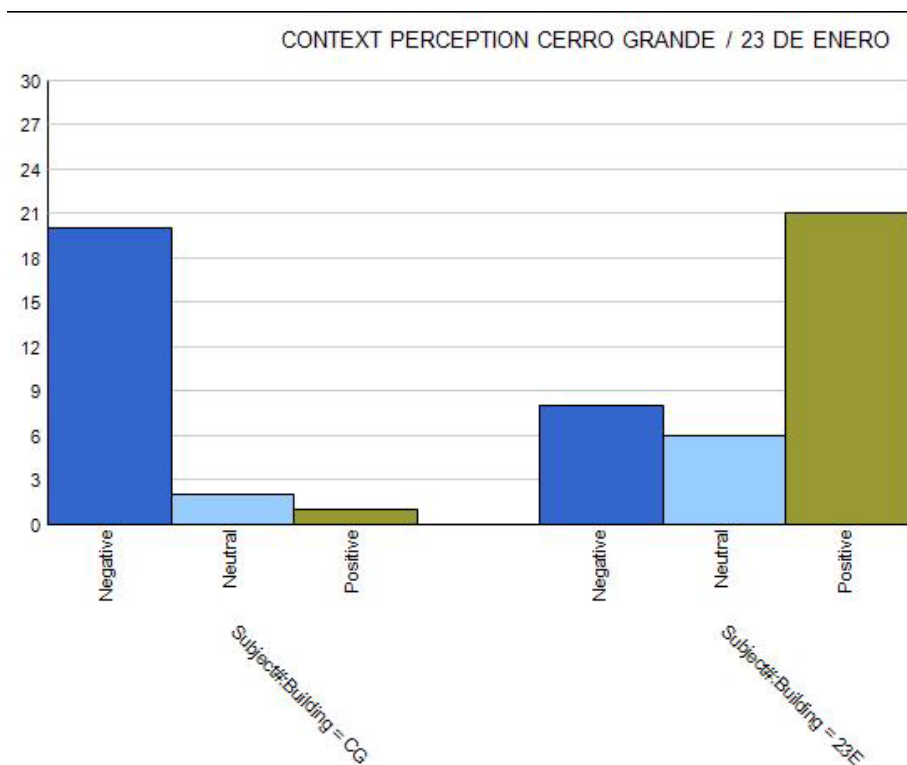


Figure VI-8. Context perception word cloud

VI. 5. a. Cerro Grande: Context Perception

The area in which *Cerro Grande* is located is horrible and stagnant. There are plenty of services but also a lot of decay. Behind the building we have this concentration of misery (CG-2).

The strong negative perception is driven by two factors: 1) the overall urban and social degradation with increased crime and troubles, and 2) the expansion of the *barrios* in what was once a green area. Only one respondent mentioned the location of nearby services and shops as a positive factor and certainly it is possible to say that the location of *Cerro Grande* has certain advantage because of its proximity to the subway and shops in a mall nearby. When *Cerro Grande* was opened a lower building with grocery stores and other shops were opened next to the building. The building still has a commercial purpose but it is severely disfigured compared to its original situation. The

construction of the High School in the plot in front of the building also brought some negative consequences by occupying the building's parking and expansion area. Parking is difficult in the area as the building's parking lot has a limited number of parking spaces and parking in the surrounding area is scarce and needs to be shared among residents and visitors. Some neighbors complain about the noise and the drinking in the corner shop located close to the building. One resident describes the problem of entering the building from the major avenue one block down: "if you want to get to the building you must go through a street where there is a *taguara* (low class bar) where people gather to drink alcohol and get drunk. If you arrive at night you have to go through that group of people" (CG-12). Other neighbors clearly express the need to change this aspect: "I would like to get rid of the car shop and the liquor stores on the lower level because that is a mess" (CG-10).



Figure VI-9 Informal settlements have expanded around Cerro Grande. This is the view from the open corridor on the twelfth floor.

The main source of complaints by residents about the context is the expansion of the *barrio* on the hillside behind the building. This green area was included in the original project as an expansion area for residents and the original model and drawings also show a service building there connected to the building's fourth floor open space with a bridge. Over time this area was occupied by informal settlers and now is part of the large systems of *barrios*. The main issues for residents are the noise, the increased insecurity in the area, and the danger related to the firing of weapons. Apartments in the lower levels are more impacted by the noise and the shootings. A resident on the second floor summarizes the existing conflict: "The back of the building was a green area with trees, very nice but now that area has been invaded by people and their ranchos and now you do not have privacy in the kitchen because the ranchos are very close" (CG-5). Two respondents have stories about bullets entering their apartments and one resident even covered the window facing the *barrio* with a steel plate.



Figure VI-10 Informal settlements (Barrios) as seen from Cerro Grande's roof

Some people had moved from the *barrio* into the building. One resident describes the change as a positive experience: “I rented for one year. I was originally from *Calle 2* in *El Valle*. Moving from the *barrio* to the apartment is a big change. In the *barrio*, I used to depend on *Jeeps* (4x4 vehicles) to climb the mountain. Here it is wonderful because I can easily get to this building” (CG-10). The people involved in the Communal Council are trying to improve the relationship with the surrounding communities. One of the residents describes these efforts and the problems that arise:

“They are defined by a common political agenda, Communal Councils of both the building and the *barrio* are in contact with each other and look for common ground to improve the community. However they recently came in conflict since *Cerro Grande’s* Communal Council brought the police to the building thus creating more stress on the *barrio’s* kingpins” (CG-2)

VI. 5. b. 23 de Enero: Context Perception

23 de Enero residents describe a more balanced relationship between positive and negative views when talking about the context. Almost all the interviews were done in *La Cañada* where residents have positive views about the surroundings of their buildings. Many of them consider themselves lucky to live in this particular sector as this area is less impacted by crime and its location has improved compared to other sectors in *23 de Enero*:

“With regards of security, *La Cañada* is very safe. I have been living here for 15 years and working for 20 years and I have not had any problems even when I come back late at night. In the library, we organize events until late night and never have experienced any issues. I feel safe in the building and do not hear any troubling noises at night” (23E-4).

The coexistence with the *barrio*, which is an issue in *Cerro Grande*, was not considered by *23 de Enero* residents in the same way. One of the residents describes the relation between blocks and *barrio* in this way: “In the *23 de Enero*, people treat each other with respect no matter if you live in the *barrio* or in the buildings” (23E-6). Another resident adds that “between both building and *barrio* residents, there is a sort of mutual acceptance and we respect each other” (23E-8). Another resident, who lived in one of the many *barrios* in *23 de Enero* describes a positive feature of the life in the informal settlement: “While in the *Barrio*, people interact more and you see people hanging out on the street and talking to each other, in the building people are more reclusive” (23E-4). However, a resident points out that the *barrios* in *23 de Enero* are different as they have different levels of consolidation.



Figure VI-11 23 de Enero is today an intertwined system of formal (superbloques) and informal (Barrios) dwellings

Other positive aspects mentioned by some respondents are the amount of schools, basketball courts and overall amenities between buildings. A resident mentions the positive impact of having many schools in the neighborhood: “23 de Enero has nurtured many educators. In this urbanism we have many schools; I can count three around my building that cover all levels of elementary and secondary education” (23E-8).

On the negative side, many respondents pointed out issues related to crime such as homicides and drug trafficking. Although many residents describe a better situation compared to previous times, there are specific complaints about the lack of security and

the role of *colectivos*, as police have no presence in the sector: “The *colectivos* do not inspire respect but fear; it is not like they provide security because there is still crime around” (23E-6). The impact of crime was also differentiated between buildings and the street as one of the residents mentioned how the building was safe compared to the street.

The 23 de Enero residents considered negatively in the context is the lack of supermarkets and commerce in general. The absence of an important commercial presence is a consequence of the events of the *caracazo*, between February 27 and 28 in 1989. In those events, the chaos led by demonstrators and looters engulfed many parts of the city and the 23 de Enero's storefront was no exception. The difficult episode is described in this way by a longtime resident that was a community leader at that time:

My building, Block 20-21 was surrounded by schools. Just next to the pre-school there was a street mall that was very active in the pre-*caracazo* times. After the 1989 lootings, they have not been the same. The owners of those shops left the community for good. For us that was traumatic because we considered them as part of our community. The *caracazo* had a strong impact on me, because I think that was the day we lost our social integrity. It was spontaneous violence that clouded our vision about the long term consequences. There was a lot of collective regret in the aftermath, we felt like we should not have done that (CG-1).

Since the difficult times of the *caracazo* there has not been a significant presence of retailers in the community, so neighbors go to nearby areas outside 23 de Enero to find supermarkets. There are small retailers between the communities and even inside the blocks there are small bodegas where residents can buy basic goods.

Table VI. 6 Summary of findings: Perception of living conditions				
	Apartment	Building	Community	Context
Cerro Grande	Strong positive perception Positives: Two-story layout Spaciousness Daylight Natural ventilation Negative Staircase in 2 bedrooms Lack of bathrooms	Strong positive perception Positives: Good quality of design. Spaciousness of common areas. Daylight on corridors. Communal spaces	Balanced perception Positives: Community values Organization Negatives: Misbehaving neighbors Not a safe environment for kids	Negative perception Positives: Location Negatives: Overall degradation Expansion of the <i>barrio</i>
23 de Enero	Strong positive perception Positives: Spaciousness Daylight Natural ventilation Negative Lack of bathrooms Kitchen too small	Strong positive perception Positives: Structural soundness. Spaciousness of corridors.	Positive perception Positives: Strong sense of community based on common identity Negatives: Crime Lack of involvement	Positive perception Positives: Amenities Coexistence with the <i>barrio</i> Negatives: Lack of supermarkets

VI. 6. Perception of Changes over Time

The assessment of the perception of change over time deals with the concept of change in the process of adaptation of human beings to their environment, one of the major components of the ecosystem perspective. In the perception of change over time there is a similar scenario compared to the perception of the context. The residents of *23 de Enero* have a balanced perception of positives and negative changes, while residents of *Cerro Grande* offered a mostly negative vision of the changes that have occurred. Recent extensive renovations in the *superbloques* of *23 de Enero* and the degradation of the context of *Cerro Grande* could be the major factors impacting on the perception of change. A landmark in the history of both communities is the transition of

the administration to condominium boards. The two communities have different perceptions about the consequences of this change.

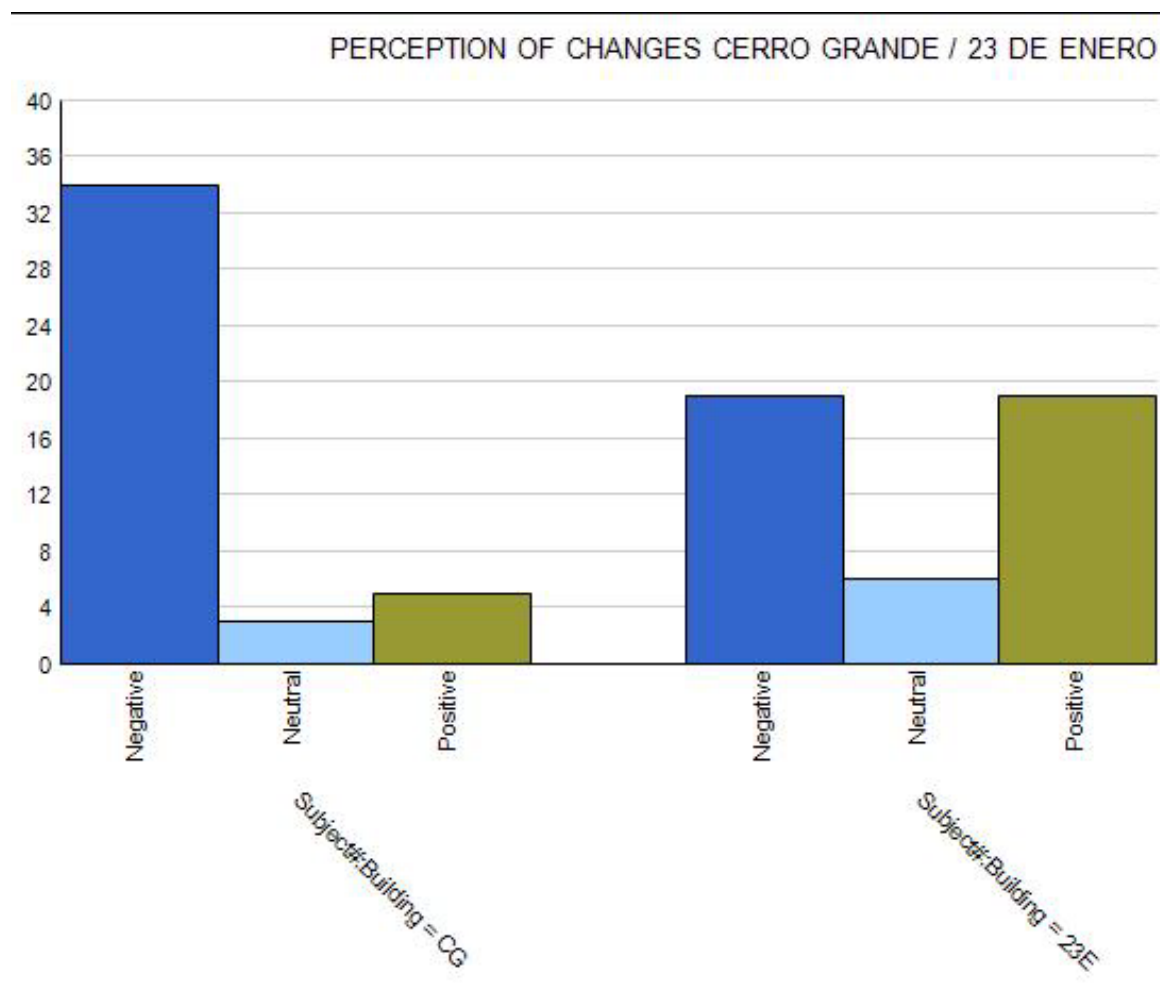


Figure VI-12 Perception of changes coding count

VI. 6. a. Cerro Grande Change: Perception of Changes

The views of *Cerro Grande* residents toward positive change are related to improvements such as the new elevator, the revamping of the sixth floor corridor, and the improvement of activities organized by the condominium board. Some neighbors consider that the increased control in the use of the fourth floor is an example of positive change. But other residents missed the free use of these spaces, including the

hallways. Two female residents that grew-up in the building describe this issue: “When my siblings grew up they played in the hallway. I sat at the stairs with my friends to play Barbie dolls. We used the fourth floor for roller skating. Nowadays you cannot do anything in the hallways” (CG-11). “Life used to be beautiful when I was young. Before, there was more solidarity. People used to gather in the corridors and we used the roof top for exercising and the 4th floor for parties. We still use the 4th floor but it is more controlled. There was a little school on the 4th floor where my children studied” (CG-14). Overall, all the residents that have been living in the building for a long time agree on the degradation of the community and the context.

The construction of the school and the overall densification of the area have created a problem with the parking that have an impact on the life of residents as relatives find it difficult to visit the building. A senior resident describes this issue: “My family tradition was to meet on New Year’s Eve but we have not done it since my mother died. That tradition was ending because when you came to visit this building there is no parking” (CG-5). Another resident points out a similar issue: “Holiday celebrations have changed for the worse. People left the building on Christmas to go with their children elsewhere. The building is lonely and desolated. That also happens at Carnival, Easter and so forth” (CG-7).

Other residents remembered the times in which the INAVI (National Housing Authority after *Banco Obrero* was dismissed) administered the building directly. The administration of the building was transferred to the owners in the early 1980s as INAVI decided to stop dedicating resources to the everyday maintenance and surveillance of the *superbloques*. One resident that lived through that process regrets this change:

“This building was better maintained before because the INAVI hired elevator operators and custodians, but now the quality of life has deteriorated” (CG-8). One aspect mentioned by many residents in *Cerro Grande* was the nostalgic remembering of former neighbors that were considered celebrities. Among the early residents of *Cerro Grande* were relatively famous artists, TV personalities, and musicians that many of the longtime residents remember.

VI. 6. b. 23 de Enero: Perception of Change

Compared to the overwhelming negative views of *Cerro Grande's* residents on the changes that have occurred, the residents of *23 de Enero* have balanced positive and negative perceptions. The history of *23 de Enero* since its inauguration in 1955 has many events worth noting. The fall of the dictatorship marked a transitional moment exemplified by the invasion of unfinished buildings by squatters and the open areas by informal settlers. The 1960s brought into prominence political groups of far-left ideology including violent guerrillas that were repressed by the police and the army.

We were in permanent conflict with the political establishment defined in the Betancourt era and the following governments, particularly in the first two periods. During Betancourt and Leoni there was a lot of repression. The Police broke into my house two times. We broke our pact with the government, if there was any, as we never felt that we had fair treatment (23E-1).

Like *Cerro Grande*, the buildings were transferred to Condominium Boards in the early 1980s, increasing the tension between the authorities and the residents. One resident remembers this event with resentment: “When INAVI transferred the administration to the neighbors we felt abandoned” (23E-5). According to residents, a major moment in the history of the neighborhood is the *caracazo* in 1989, when the

looting and chaos was followed by repression from the Armed Forces. The city lived through those events with commotion, but the *23 de Enero* residents suffered the most.

A resident that lived at that time within the community assessed the events:

During the *caracazo*, I was living in the barrio *El Observatorio* and working in a bank. People here went downtown to look for what they thought was theirs, for what society denied them, they did not consider themselves to be looters. In *23 de Enero* there were stores that people did not loot but others were even burnt to the ground. The repression started on February 28, 1989. Police, the National Guard, and the Army participated, it was brutal. The Army used machine guns and shot the buildings. Some neighbors organized themselves and fought the National Guard. People here did not feel like criminals, they thought they were fighting for their rights. We were stigmatized as looters but instead we felt like we were the victims of a nationwide looting. While the rest of the city was calm, here the struggle lasted for a week. Then they started to raid the apartments. Recently, the community organization ousted the police because they inspired fear rather than security. The *caracazo* was the beginning of the end of the *cuarta republica*. Those of us who survived the repression in the 1980s feel blessed as our lives changed for the better when Chavez came into power (23E-3).

The government of Hugo Chávez that started in 1999 is considered by residents another turning point as there has been a significant increase of investment on the aging buildings and the promotion of social organization that were repressed in the pre-Chávez time. Most people interviewed addressed this as a positive change but others resented the political polarization and its effect on everyday life.

The municipal government has carried out the ongoing renovations of the buildings as part of a plan called *Caracas Socialista* (Socialist Caracas) that included

participatory tools. Among the actions of this plan is the installation of one new elevator in each building, therefore alleviating the problems of vertical circulation: “When the *Caracas Socialista* plan was implemented by the Municipality, the neighborhood improved significantly. This was in decay before that plan because many people did not understand the significance of this place” (23E-5). Other residents point out the alleviation of crime, particularly of drug trafficking: “Drug trafficking is not as problematic as it was before, as a result of *colectivos*’ actions” (23E-9). As people attempted to protect themselves from crimes and vandalism they created semi-private spaces by putting gates in the corridors and staircases as this resident describes:

There was a time in which we had many burglaries. After those events, a group of neighbors organized themselves to fence the staircases. We know that this was not an ideal solution because there may be issues during an emergency, but we got our project approved and now our section of the hallway and the two staircases are locked (23E-5).

Other residents are concerned about these actions as they create safety concerns for the whole building. A resident complained on how the circulation inside the building is difficult because of these interventions:

There are random sections in the staircases that are locked with bars by neighbors. It is very difficult to find your way up or down when the elevator is not working. I think this will be an issue if we have an emergency. People started locking the staircases to prevent other neighbors from using them. Right now, this is a disaster (23E-9).

In *23 de Enero*, while people perceived an overall improvement of conditions as a result of the renovation plan implemented by the government, residents also

perceived that pervasive issues such as crime are still present, therefore impacting their perception of change.

VI. 7. Changes Proposed by Users

As part of the adaptation process, every user has introduced changes to the apartments but some residents also have opinions about changes in the building and community. Proposed changes are moving in two directions: 1) changes to the physical arrangements and 2) changes to behavioral patterns. No significant amount of change has been proposed for the physical layout compared to ideas to promote changes in the behavior of people. Residents in both buildings seem to be concerned about how some changes are disfiguring the original organization of the buildings.

Proposed changes by *Cerro Grande* residents are mainly related to the need to renovate the aging systems such as the electrical, water supply and sewage system. Over many interviews there were continuous complaints about the water-supply-system piping, which causes frequent leaks and floods. Many residents proposed the need to renovate this system. Some concerns have been expressed about disfigurement of the building because of the changes to the common areas. Three residents complained about these changes, including the occupation of open spaces underneath the building at the ground level.

I would not change anything. I would prefer to reverse all the changes done, particularly those implemented in the façade (CG-4).

I would like the first level and entrances to be the way they were originally so we can have more space for cars (CG-5).

Another resident complained about the disorder in the façade because of the different models of screens installed by people. I would love for us all to have the same balconies (CG-8).

Other residents however proposed changes to the original structure. For two residents the stairwells lacked sufficient daylight and natural ventilation. One resident suggested that the stairwell layout could be wrong: “I would change the building’s stairs, as they are remote and closed, I do not know what happens there and they look too dangerous. There are no emergency lights in the stairs. I would change the stairs so they would be in the middle [of the building] or install windows” (CG-12). A resident suggested installing gates in the corridors because she/he is afraid of children climbing and falling off. Other suggestions were focused on the lower level where there is an open space between the building and the hillside. Residents suggested repurposing this space to improve the trash collection receptacles and to gain additional recreational space.

In response to questions about desired changes, *23 de Enero* residents are more concerned with issues related to education and awareness. Trash disposal is considered an important problem affecting the community and according to many residents, its solution is not related to the improvement of the infrastructure but to the education of the community as one resident asserts: “I do not propose a physical change but an increase in community awareness on topics such as the use of the common spaces and trash disposal” (23E-4). The need for education and of regulation is mentioned as one of the issues that need to be changed “improve community rules, people need to know that it is one thing to be a revolutionary and another to be abusive. Regulations should be applied to everyone and they should be promoted through

workshops and seminars. “The law should be applied indiscriminately” (23E-8). This lack of a clear direction for community organizations is the result of the overlap of different institutions (condominium boards, *colectivos* and communal centers) that create issues in the definition of rules for coexistence. Another resident suggested increasing the condominium fee to have more resources for events and improvements. The need to preserve the buildings as part of the heritage of Caracas is also expressed: “I disagree with some improvements done by people in their apartments. I think that changes should be regulated, because this is the work of Carlos Raul Villanueva” (23E-4).

VI. 7. a. Challenges

There are many challenges facing *superbloque* residents and the many systems to which they are adapting: apartment, building, community and context. During the interviews, I identified several issues that constantly arose from conversations and others that were evident through field observation.

1. Challenges related to community: Large communities in *superbloques* are a challenge for community organization in two respects: the application and enforcement of rules for coexistence and the overlapping of different community organizations with conflicting agendas.
2. Challenges related to utilities: Both *Cerro Grande* and *23 de Enero* residents are concerned about the need to renew aging and outdated infrastructural systems such as electricity, water supply and sewage.

3. Challenge related to maintenance: The extension of common areas and open spaces around the buildings create a challenge for residents in order to keep these areas clean and up to date.
4. Challenges related to context: Large infrastructural units such as the *superbloques* depend heavily on their context to improve the experience of living. However, the problems located in the context are out of the control of these communities.
5. Challenges related to crime: According to the interviews a significant amount of crime exists inside and around the *superbloques*. Drug consumption and trafficking, burglary, and robberies are still common issues for residents.
6. Challenges related to preservation: The *superbloque's* physical organization have suffered from their transformation in the last 60 years. Some of these transformations might have degraded the building's original characteristics.
7. Challenges related to parking: *Superbloque* designers did not allot sufficient space for parking as this was not an important issue in the 1950s. As residents improved their social conditions and standard of living, they and built equity by buying cars. Currently the lack of parking spaces is a severe issue in these communities.
8. Challenges related to trash disposal: The large number of apartments in represents a challenge for trash disposal and collection both for the community and for the institutions in charge of it.

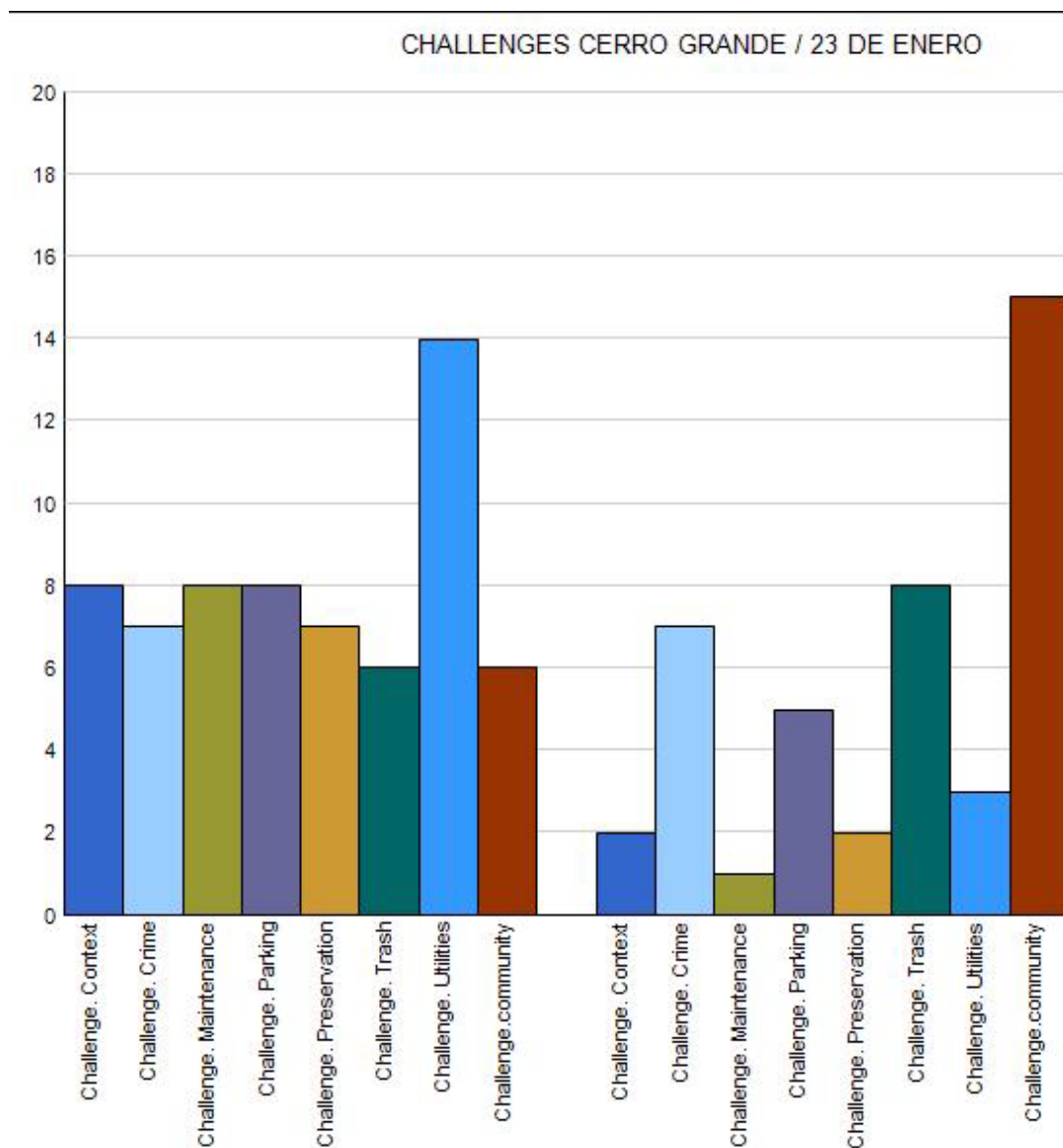


Figure VI-13 Challenges coding count. Cerro Grande (left) and 23 de Enero (right)

There are differences in the way the two groups of residents interviewed perceived these challenges. *Cerro Grande* residents mentioned more challenges in their interviews compared to *23 de Enero* residents. This is worth noting because the context of *23 de Enero* residents is more complex yet they perceived fewer challenges compared to *Cerro Grande* residents. The primary source of challenges is also different

in both communities. *Cerro Grande* residents are more concerned with the condition of the building systems while *23 de Enero* residents are more concerned about their community. *23 de Enero* residents seem to care less about the utilities and infrastructure, although they have concerns about trash disposal and crime similar to their counterparts in *Cerro Grande*. There are strong differences in the way issues such as the context, preservation, and maintenance are perceived by both groups as *Cerro Grande* residents consider them important challenges.

VII. Chapter Seven: Discussion and conclusions

For the National Housing Plan, designers at *Banco Obrero's Taller de Arquitectura* (TABO) defined a framework based on a utopian conception of housing design largely influenced by international trends. The resulting *superbloque* designs were initially rich in their interpretation of their precedents but as the policy shifted to a slum-clearance purpose, the designs focused on reducing economic (or cost) aspects to increase the production of new housing units. The grandiose physical dimensions of *superbloques* aligned with the dictatorship's narrative of progress and monumentalism but architectural and functional qualities introduced in the early designs did not meet its financial expectations. The planners responded to the government's needs in the second stage of the housing plan, *Cerro Piloto*, by proposing simplified versions of *superbloques* for existing low-income residents from *barrios*. They tried to mediate between the aspirations of the dictatorship and of the future residents by researching the living conditions of the latter, but their assessment focused on quantifiable dimensions such as household size and ignored the cultural and social aspects. The government placed (often forcefully) *barrio* residents and other low-income households from rural backgrounds in the innovative *superbloques*, confident that the dwellers would adapt to a new existence that included innovations such as the elevators, trash chutes, and mechanized ventilation in a high rise without any assistance in negotiating this transition. This study has focused on examining the evolution of the architectural features of the *superbloques* compared to the original conditions to assess the residents' process of appropriation and to characterize their "ways of operation" and

define future challenges for the preservation of both the buildings and their communities.

VII. 1. *Superbloque* design evolution: reductionism

The historical, formal, and spatial analyses developed in both case studies highlight the reductionist process (Lopez, 1986) in the evolution of *superbloques* in which the ideal of the communal house and high-end architectural practices defined in the precedents were interrupted in favor of standardization of the production of housing units. In this process, programmatic (social) and architectural amenities transferred from examples such as Le Corbusier's *Unité* in Marseille to the first *superbloques* were later omitted to satisfy cost and efficiency goals. In response to the post-World-War II housing shortage, Le Corbusier's original building integrated residential programs with additional functions and amenities combined with a complex structural design that was intended to forge an architectural manifesto about the improved living experience possible in high-rise, high-density housing. The first trilogy of *superbloques*, *Cerro Grande*, *Quinta Crespo* and *El Paraíso*, fulfilled the goal to develop an innovative version of the experimental building type set by Le Corbusier. However, Villanueva and his team reduced the expectations and the complexity of the subsequent solutions to favor standardization in order to create a greater number of housing units to meet the dictatorship's goal to eliminate informal settlements. The *Multicelular CP* and *Diego de Losada superbloque* models were the answer to the dictatorship's requirement and were built in large numbers that eventually surpassed the goals of the plan.

This study included a case study from the first trilogy, *Cerro Grande*, and a second case study from the standardized type, *Diego de Losada (23 de Enero)*, which

revealed three critical aspects that describe the reductionist process in the evolution of the *superbloque*'s design: the suppression of in-building common spaces; variations in the circulation layout from a horizontally stratified system to a vertical one; and changes in the façade design as a result of standardization.

VII. 1. a. In-building common spaces

Closer to Le Corbusier's Marseille's experiment, *Cerro Grande* includes in its original design communal spaces at the ground level, fourth floor, and roof. The later simplified design for *Diego de Losada* does not provide similar spaces within the structure as intermediate spaces were suppressed to reduce costs. In *Diego de Losada*, the lack of communal spaces within the structure is compensated for by providing communal facilities in between buildings. These shared facilities reinforced the ties between members of different buildings by introducing diverse opportunities for social exchange including daycare, sport facilities and commercial areas.

VII. 1. b. The Circulatory Layout

Another design feature that evolved from *Cerro Grande* to *23 de Enero* with contrasting outcomes is the circulation layout of the building, the system navigated by residents to find their apartments and build relationships with neighbors. The stratification in *Cerro Grande* is emphasized by the limited number of vertical options that connect the horizontal corridors, whereas the complex system in *23 de Enero* provides many alternatives to move vertically and horizontally among apartments. The configuration of *Cerro Grande* facilitates the navigation, way finding and the internal organization of residents, while the *Diego de Losada* unit increases the options of integration, while preventing the self-organization of residents according to clear sub-

units within the building. Also the circulation layout of *Cerro Grande* permits the control of the ground level by closing the only two points of access, whereas the multiple staircases of *23 de Enero* and the interconnectivity of the system make this task of occupant control difficult.

VII. 1. c. Façade design

Cerro Grande's simplified structural design allows the development of a “free façade” one of the five elements originally set by Le Corbusier as improved characteristic of modern design. The use of cantilevers in the structure granted more freedom to Guido Bermudez in the design of façade elements. On its side, the structural design in *23 de Enero* replaced the cantilevers with a concrete frame, which created a monotonous façade, which was reinforced by the repetitive layout of the apartments and the standardization of windows. Carlos Brando used a limited palette of elements compared to Bermudez but included random sections of color according to artist Mateo Manaure *policromías* to alleviate this monotony.

VII. 2. Resident's ways of operating

The understanding of the physical evolution of *superbloques* provides a foundation to search for an answer to the main research questions: what are the “ways of operating” developed by residents to appropriate the spatial layout and address the challenges set forth by the original design? And how can that inform the implementation of policies and actions to preserve these buildings and improve the living conditions within them for their residents? I also ask how these “ways of operating” and the challenges vary in the two case studies that represent the high-end and the low-end in the evolution of *superbloque* design. Throughout this study, I found that residents

develop three general practices to appropriate the physical layout and introduce meaning according to their expectations and everyday activities. These practices are 1) the promotion of community life through informal and formal organizations shaped by the layout of the common spaces; 2) the nurturing of a particular identity of the *superbloque* residents based on each building's distinctiveness; and 3) the retrofitting of the physical layout to address not only functional needs but also the construction of meaning.

VII. 2. a. The promotion of community life

In the interviews, residents frequently refer to community issues, spanning from their interaction with their next-door neighbor to the building's community organizations. The creation and fostering of links among neighbors is a crucial issue to improve the quality of life in *superbloques*. Designers anticipated this issue in the early design of *superbloques* when they included in-building community facilities and communal open spaces such as *Cerro Grande*'s fourth floor and roof terrace. In the *Diego de Losada* model used in *23 de Enero*, the designers adjusted for a minimum amount of circulation spaces and reduced communal facilities and thus impeded the interaction among neighbors of the same building. The stratified layout of *Cerro Grande* promotes interaction between neighbors that share the same corridor, whereas residents of *Diego de Losada* have multiple pathways open to them in circulating through the building thus reducing the options for territorialization. Overall, the layout imposes more challenges for *23 de Enero* residents to develop community life as they lack areas that promote community interaction. These concerns are reflected in the interviews by residents who mentioned the lack of control over stairways, the dearth of spaces for children, limited

community organization, and the absence of effective maintenance and safety policies that requires consensual decisions.

Residents in both case studies have been defining community life in different ways. While *Cerro Grande* residents have been building their identity as a community within the limits of the building, those living in *23 de Enero* build their community inside and beyond the limits of the building including their surroundings, other buildings and the informal settlements that have growth in between buildings. The residents of *23 de Enero* refer to their community as “el 23” without making distinctions between those who live in *superbloques* and those who live in the *barrio*. The large *23 de Enero* complex underwent a difficult evolution as their residents consider the area a “city within a city” that has faced periods of insurgence, stagnation, and alienation from the rest of the city. Residents defined these periods during the interviews, affirming the importance of community life to alleviate the outcomes of their struggle during times of repression and their frustration with the lack of attention from politicians from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Cerro Grande, in contrast, blended with the existing fabric of private residential estates in Caracas, with their neighbors assuming community practices similar to middle and high-income residential buildings. During the interviews, *Cerro Grande* residents showed more focus on the need for an effective community organization represented in the Condominium Board to address maintenance and the renovation of the building itself.

In both cases, the reinforcement of the existing Condominium Boards is necessary to empower residents in the decision-making process. Another aspect of community enhancement is the need to connect the community organizations of

superbloques and surrounding *barrios* to define common goals and propose actions to improve the relationship between *superbloques* and their surrounding informal settlements. In *Cerro Grande*, the linking of residents of the building and the *barrio* could improve the residents' perception of the context. In *23 de Enero*, a better coupling between the existing community organizations could improve the process of definition and management of projects.

An evident challenge in both case studies is the lack of community spaces and areas for children. The need for community controlled social spaces for children to play safely is one of the key aspects defined by Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian to improve the quality of life in public housing complexes. The lack of safe spaces for children is one of the most evident social needs not considered by *superbloque* designers.

VII. 2. b. Reinforcement of identity

A recent documentary about the history of Saint Louis' ill-famed complex Pruitt-Igoe¹⁵ includes testimonials by former residents who both describe the often-difficult living conditions and the positive aspects of community life. While watching the interviews, I was surprised by the similarities between the values of community engagement and participation in local events described by residents of Pruitt-Igoe with those of residents of Caracas' *superbloques*, particularly with those in *23 de Enero*. Residents of these two distinctive geographic contexts faced a similar set of challenges as the result of urban policies, architectural-style issues, urban design considerations, and social segregation.

¹⁵ *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History* (2011) directed by Chad Freidrichs

In response to these challenges and to counter stigmatization, residents reinforce their identity as differentiated urban dwellers based on the uniqueness of the architectural features of their homes. In the documentary, Pruitt-Igoe residents highlighted how outsiders of the complex used the expression “the pent-house for the poor” as a degrading moniker for their apartments, while another resident found this expression contained a positive connotation of an innovative life-style. In Caracas, the *superbloque* residents in both case studies build their identity upon the uniqueness of the projects they inhabit. For example, in the interviews many *Cerro Grande* and *23 de Enero* residents show awareness of the historical background of the inception of their community and the uniqueness of the complex in the city. They mentioned aspects such as the linkage of Carlos Raúl Villanueva to the design, and at least four residents of *Cerro Grande* are aware that their building is based on a foreign precedent. Overall they consider their buildings as part of the legacy of a time of heroic architecture represented in the building spree of the 1940s and 1950s that brought many modern landmarks to Caracas’ landscape.

The struggle to reclaim the pride to live in *superbloques* is represented in a popular 1964 song by the prominent Venezuelan singer/composer Simón Díaz.¹⁶ The song builds upon the existing stigmatization of *superbloques* through a fictional resident who is not willing to give up his desire to live in a *superbloque*, not even for the love of a woman who lives in a traditional neighborhood of single family houses:

Como yo vivo en *superbloque*/ quizás por eso no me quieres / eres igual a
otras mujeres / y una más del bojote / Como yo vivo en *superbloque* / tú

¹⁶ Simón Díaz (1928-2014) is one of the most laureate composers of Venezuela’s folklore. His music celebrates the stories of the everyday life of Venezuelans. His 1964 Album with Hugo Blanco “Llegó Simón” (Simón is here) included his major hit “El Superbloque” that helped Díaz gain popularity.

vives por el Cementerio /por eso cargas un misterio / quieres que yo te soporte / Un *superbloque* es lo mejor para poder vivir / no vengas a decir que hay algo superior / porque soy pana de Julián, soy llave de Martín / así como verán soy chévere de aquí / Por eso busca un novio de otro lote / yo no te cambio por mi *superbloque* (Bis)

As I live in the *superbloque*/ maybe that's why you don't love me / you are just like other women / and just one more of the bunch / as I live in the *superbloque* / and you live by the cemetery /that's why you carry a mystery /, you want me to tolerate you / a *superbloque* is the best to live in / don't come to say that there is something better / because I'm Julian's pal, I'm Martin's chum / so as you can see I'm cool around here / so go and look for a boyfriend somewhere else /I don't change my *superbloque* for you (Bis)

The song emphasizes the dialectical opposition between the *superbloque* as an example of the innovative yet popular high-rise, and the traditional low-rise neighborhood (*el Cementerio*). The fictional resident defends the *superbloque* by highlighting the quality of community life through the idealization of his friendship with Julian and Martin. He dismisses his girlfriend as she is just “one more of the bunch” that favors life in traditional houses. The struggle of this fictional character exemplifies the need of *superbloque* residents to overcome the stigmatization of their habitat by crafting a meaningful connection with the architecture, a factor that should be relevant in any proposed action toward the improvement of living conditions.

VII. 2. c. Retrofitting

Inside their apartments, residents have been able to eliminate unwanted features, replace old elements for new ones, and add elements to improve functionality and build meaning to makes their homes reflect their identity. But more interesting are

the interventions completed to territorialize areas beyond the limits of their apartments and those that are the results of collective decisions. There are diverse driving forces behind these interventions. The addition of barred gates initially seemed a response to the need for an increased sense of personal safety and to increase private claims to public space. However it is also worth noting that these interventions are outlets for the expression of resident's self-identity, breaking the monotony of the repetitive systems. For example, the monotony of the façade of the *Diego de Losada superbloque* has been evolving into a complex expression given the wide array of random interventions by residents that include a chaotic yet multidimensional overlay of new elements over the original design. This new overlay is composed of bars, colors, vegetation, canopies and other props creating a new layer over the original building. Some residents, however, do not appreciate the lack of coordination in these interventions and want them to be addressed.

In *Cerro Grande*, the open spaces on the ground level increased the complexity of the massing but lacked a clear programmatic purpose. *Banco Obrero* eventually occupied these spaces by enclosing the areas for social services such as a daycare and a police station. While the government drastically modified the building on the ground level, residents respected the unique layout by keeping the open fourth floor and the roof as communal spaces. Although the common laundry was eventually closed and the roof has very restricted access, these areas have kept their original design

As part of an extended process of renovation, financial and logistical support from authorities is required to improve the performance of utilities including new water supplies and sanitation piping to address the recurrent failures mentioned by *Cerro*

Grande residents. In addition to these tasks of retrofitting, other projects could capitalize on the unique formal qualities of *superbloques* to improve their overall environmental performance: 1) the use of the ample roofs to collect and harvest rainwater; and 2) the promotion of solar panels on the oversized façades could both address sustainable practices and improve the aesthetic appearance of these buildings. These actions however, need to be regulated by both residential organizations and preservation authorities.

VII. 3. Future Research Directions

The limitations of the qualitative design method and the scope of this research expose the need to propose future research directions. Possibly the main direction of research should move towards a complete assessment of existing *superbloques* with a similar scope to the CINVA report, focused on large complexes such as *23 de Enero*. But more specifically, and based on the findings, new research directions could be established by including further case studies and a closer examination of the relationship between spatial layout, user appropriation, and community development.

The findings in this research are the result of comparing two different models of *superbloques* in two different research settings that house two different populations. In some sense, they represent the dialectical contrast between the earlier "super" single-standing *superbloque* (with social facilities) and the stripped-down modular version (without them). They do not, however, represent the intermediate cases such as those found in *Simón Rodríguez*, a *superbloque* complex in Caracas developed using variations of the *Diego de Losada* model but aimed at middle-income residents. This complex could represent a middle ground between the two case studies analyzed.

Other examples of this middle ground between the case studies included in this study are complexes of the second wave such as *Lomas de Propatria* that deployed the *Multicelular CP* a *superbloque* model designed by Guido Bermúdez that reproduced the structural characteristics of *Cerro Grande* and a larger set of apartment types. The *Multicelular CP* uses a structural frame similar to *Cerro Grande* and distributes the staircases on the exterior, avoiding the lack of daylighting evident in the *Diego de Losada* model. This simplified *Cerro Grande* was also deployed in large numbers for low-income families and, like *23 de Enero*, these complexes are now besieged by informal settlements but lack the location advantages of the latter.

This research design was also limited in its sample size for the interview process so the results of the survey included in the last section of the questionnaire are not considered as they do not have statistical significance. A second stage using surveys to a large number of residents could provide more data to be analyzed using statistical tools. Some working hypotheses for this stage of research could compare levels of satisfaction between residents in two case studies, also between residents in the same building of different groups according to age, gender, location, employment and so forth. A quantitative component could expand the scope of the research results using a mixed-method design and reinforce the conclusions of the qualitative design developed in this study.

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Appendix A. Interview Questionnaire



University of Kansas, School of Architecture, Design and Planning, PhD Architecture program
Superbloque evolution field research



Part I. Demographic and socio economic data

1. Age (18-25) (26-35) (35-45) (46-60) (61+)
2. Sex: Female – Male
3. Number of people living in apartment ()
4. Children yes / no
5. Education: College, Secondary, Elementary, none
6. Employment: Public Sector, Private sector, Self-employed, Unemployed
7. Housing type before superbloque: apartment, house, informal house
8. Coming for countryside yes/no

Part II. Apartment and Building

1. Apartment type (Cerro Grande) A-B Building Number (23 de Enero)
2. Apartment level:
3. Ownership: Original owner, transferred ownership or inheritance, renter
4. When you arrived to the building?
5. Time living in building (0-5) (6-10) (10-20) (21-40) (41-60) Current resident (yes-no)

Part III. Qualitative study

1. How do you like the building?
2. How do you like the community?
3. How do you like the apartment?
4. Did you choose to live in the building? Why?
5. What are the major challenges for the everyday life
6. How's the building different during Christmas or other major holidays.
7. Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?
8. What elements in the building would you like to change?
9. If you were able to move in the future would you consider a similar apartment?

Part IV. Satisfaction survey

	1	2	3	4	5
	Dissatisfied			Satisfied	
Overall satisfaction with the building					
Overall satisfaction with the apartment					
Overall satisfaction with community					
Overall satisfaction with services nearby					
Overall Satisfaction with common areas					
Overall Satisfaction with building appearance					
Likely to move from the apartment					
Likely to recommend this complex					

Appendix B. Interviews

CG1

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
46-60	F	3	NO	COL	SE	House	NO	CG	B	6	TO	1974	21-40

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

This building is a very comfortable structure. Hallways are very ample and location is great with many options for transportation. Corridors are spacious and location is great. The apartment is practical and comfortable. Is well lit and utilities are centralized so is very easy to fix occasional problems such as leakages. We are more than a community, we are a family. People do care for each other here, particularly the elderly. However, younger people tend to not going outside their apartments. We Venezuelans love to live in Community. I belong to the Condominium Board but there is also a Communal Council working directly with the government. The Condominium Board charges a monthly bill toward building maintenance. There are no other associations.

Did you choose to live here?

My sister bought this apartment from *Banco Obrero*. She worked as a secretary for the private enterprise when he applied for social housing. In that moment there was not laundry inside the apartments, there was a common laundry in the fourth floor.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

Trash is our main challenge. Our garbage accumulates in the back of the building because there is a lot to handle. Very often we see rats and other pests so we need to spray rat poison every weekend. We hired people to take care of the trash and the

cleaning of the common areas. Parking is also challenging. The building only has parking spots in the front. Some neighbors organized themselves and took a vacate land next to the building, creating more parking places.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

We try to celebrate holidays such as Christmas, Mother's day and Children's day. We use the fourth level for events and neighbors use it for dance therapy, religious gatherings and for the metaphysics association. In Christmas we have a *Parranda*, a group of musicians going over all common areas from the lower level to the upper story where we arrange tables with food and drinks.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I have not made any significant changes other than expanding an existing closet and the renovation of the two bathrooms and the kitchen.

What elements would you like to change?

I would like to have a better electrical system as the existing one is very old.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would never move unless is for *El Paraiso's Quintas Aéreas* (A very similar housing type). I do not like houses.

Other testimonies

This is a spectacular community. I work in the Condominium Board as a treasurer; we are five people working there. There are not rented apartments here but you can find people renting bedrooms.

CG2

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
46-60	F	3	NO	COL	R-Public	House	NO	CG	B	13	TO	1973	41-60

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

Cerro Grande is different compared to other buildings. For example, the hallways are odd but beautiful. The fourth floor is a wonderful space. The length of the building is impressive. My apartment is more than beautiful; I love my balcony overlooking the city and the mountain (*El Ávila*). It's very spacious. People is often solidary, there is a confraternity. However as time passes new people have moved with different values, sometimes in conflict with the existing community. Also politics have influenced our solidarity for the worse but we stand to preserve our community with our attitude.

Did you choose to live here?

My father applied for an apartment in the *Banco Obrero* and he was offered two options: the first one was in *Caricuao* which was very far from downtown and the second one was *Cerro Grande* which he chooses. My father was a driver in the ministry of defense.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The major problem is the water supply plumbing that is collapsed, we have leakages very often. The building is quite old and pretty sick. Garbage is an issue because people

are not aware about the best ways to dispose it. We have a terrible problem with illegal drugs. Some kids are using the stairways to do drugs at night. They are neighbors and we have tried to change the behavior with no success. Parking was not considered in the original design so has been always a hassle. My father got a parking spot when he moved and we inherited it. New residents would not find a parking spot. Other residents organized themselves to recover a vacate area into a parking lot and they keep it for themselves with no chance for other people to use that space.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

When Ingrid and I are in the Condominium Board we have always promoted Christmas celebrations including decorations, music and cards. But others Condominium Boards have done nothing so celebrating the holidays depends on the current board. There are dance therapy classes organized by a resident four times a week in the fourth floor. Other residents of Christian faith meet two times a week to pray and there is also the metaphysics group. The fourth floor is available for residents to rent and organize events but there are restrictions as we have issues in the past with noise. Right now is available just for *piñatas* in the afternoon.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I have made just few changes like new windows and bars. Kitchen and one bathroom were renovated with new tiles. I like to keep the balcony open as I hoard stuff there. The washer and dryer were placed close to the bathroom.

What elements would you like to change?

I would like to renovate the facade and other elements. I would not like to change anything, just to improve what we already have. The first floor requires renovation and right now is occupied by the police; however they have not been very useful on improving our safety.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would not like to move because I am very rooted here and I think it would be very difficult to find an apartment like this within what I can afford. I do not like tiny apartment such as the ones some of my relatives live.

Other testimonies

The area in which *Cerro Grande* is located is horrible and stagnant. There are plenty of services but also a lot of decay. Behind the building we have this concentration of misery. As they are defined by is common political agenda, communal councils of both the building and the *barrio* are in contact and they look for common ground, and to improve the community. However they recently became in conflict as *Cerro Grande's* Communal Council brought the police to the building thus creating more stress to *barrio's* king pings. Community Councils have been useful in finding new elevators to the building.

CG3

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
61+	F	2	NO	ELE	R-Public	House	YES	CG	A	12	OO	1971	41-60

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

I like it very much, is big. We have four elevators, although only two are operational. The fourth floor is spectacular and we use it for events. Water and sanitation pipes usually collapse due to building age and lack of maintenance. I am suffering with the stairs because my knees hurt but overall I like my apartment. I live here with my son but eventually we were six people living together and the apartment never feels crowded. I also like the views. I get along with everybody here and I am like to contribute, anything that I have been asked to do for the community I did it gladly.

Did you choose to live here?

My husband came from outside Caracas when he was transferred in his Company. He was given the chance to select an apartment in the building as he was very responsible paying his dues in a previous *Banco Obrero* house.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The main problem is Insecurity, but not inside the building but in the neighborhood because we are surrounded by the *barrio*. People in the *barrio* sometimes have very loud music not letting us sleep. Garbage is not an important issue as the truck is here all days to pick it up (from 9 to 9:30)

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

Everything is beautiful in Christmas as we are concerned about it and decorate. We don't put decorations in the hallways because some of them have been stolen in the

past. I do not see many differences in the way people interact with each other. I always spend holidays in my apartment with my family unless we move to the Zulia State.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I renovated the kitchen; I changed the steel bars divider in the staircase for a lower wall. I keep the original windows and the façade. I put the washer in the first level next to the bedrooms and the bathrooms. I have the original flooring but I have a crack from the 1967 earthquake. I thought of putting tiles on the floor but I was convinced not to do so.

What elements would you like to change?

I would not change anything. I would prefer to reverse all the changes done, particularly those implemented in the façade. The first floor was a great free plan but was invaded when the judicial police move to the building some 25 years ago.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would not like to move to an apartment, I would move only if we have a large house.

Other testimonies

Communal Councils are working to fix the utilities system in the building.

I am participating in the Condominium Board as a collector, working together with the treasurer.

CG4

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
61+	F	4	NO	ELE	R-Priv	IH	NO	CG	B	9 00		1974	21-40

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

I think the building is good; we never had a complaint about the structure. The only thing is the piping system, although we have been working on it. The trash chute is decaying. We use to have issues with the elevators but now we have two new ones plus two that were installed in the 90s. We need our façade to be taken care of with painting the same way they did in the 90s. The building was ocher in the 60s but since I live here the building is light green and beige.

I like everything about the apartment. It has three bedrooms and the entrance space is great. The problem is that we had that invasion in the back. I have done the best I could to improve my apartment. It has been always comfortable. It has been 4 people here all the time.

People are very united, like family, always taking care of each other. If somebody is sick, we all try to help. If somebody passes away we also contribute and support. I have not been in the Condominium Board but I have been a vocal for my level. We all take care of each other.

Did you choose to live here?

When I decided to move, I started searching for an apartment in *El Valle*. When I introduced my application in the INAVI, they gave me a list of possible sectors including *Caricuao, San Agustín, Coche*, and so on. But when they mentioned *Cerro Grande* I did not hesitate. I saw my apartment and I liked it right away.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

We are always aware of each other so I feel safe here, we are looking for government funding for new trash chutes. Insecurity is always an issue.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

Christmas time is beautiful. Everybody is happy and put Christmas decorations in their houses and doors. We put ornaments in the elevator lobbies. During the year there are no other events. We have the fourth floor where we did a small room for our meetings and we allow neighbors to rent it for children parties in early hours to avoid bothering the neighbors.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

When we need to fix the pipes, walls have to be broken in the kitchen and bathrooms. I have renovated my kitchen and bathrooms. The apartment has bars that we put after the INAVI transferred us the ownership. We organized ourselves to put bars with the same color, a pale yellow. Doors were painted in brown. I also had bars in the bedroom's windows but I took them off after my children grew.

What elements would you like to change?

I would like the first level and entrances to be way they were originally so we can have more rooms for cars.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would like to move to a house because I am struggling with the staircase.

Other testimonies

CG5

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
61+	F	2	NO	SEC	R-Public	House	YES	CG	B	3	OO	1958	41-60

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The building was well-designed, is a great architectural work. In that moment was wonderful, extremely modern. Over time it has deteriorated because the maintenance is not the same. Before, *Banco Obrero* was in charge of maintenance but now is on the owners. Unfortunately, not all owners are responsible persons. When asking for a contribution toward the good of everyone, not many people want to contribute and that increases the overall decline. It has its faults, for example the bathrooms do not have windows because they were designed with mechanical ventilation that previously worked very well, but eventually stopped working and now is a dark place. There used to be a power plant for emergencies but some people stole this power plant. That power plant was on the ground floor. There were a series of advantages that aren't present today. The back of the building was a green area with trees, very nice but now that area was invaded by people and their ranchos and now you do not have privacy in the kitchen because the *ranchos* are very close. That *cerro* is overcrowded and filled with terrible people, and on weekends they form *zaperocos* and there are shootings with deaths and bullets come to stop at the building. All those issues contribute to life here becoming more unpleasant. One stays here because it has no resources to buy another apartment; those white resources have already left the building.

I like that the apartment is very well lit. On the other hand, it is also inconvenient because when one of those big glasses breaks you have to fix it. The windows in the room are floor to ceiling, but I like daylight. Glass is extremely expensive to replace. A bullet entered in my sister's room. Weekends are horrible because there are always parties in the *barrio* until dawn. There are a lot of drug trafficking, There are teenagers that I know since they were born that are now crack heads. They removed lightbulbs in the stairs in order to be able to smoke there. The police do not help because it has a political purpose more than anything else. One of the bedrooms is big but the others are very small. The dining room is quite wide. We have closets everywhere.

The community has transformed. Here used to live people with the same intellectual level but now is very different. The majority of the original dwellers are gone. There are college graduates; a recent survey said that there are 51 professionals. I try to meet with people with similar interest but they end looking at us as *elitesque* persons. Many people from the *cerro* have moved here because for them living in this building is their golden dream. But when they move here is horrible because they are accustomed to these big and noisy parties. I have become insomnia, and I know that this is normal for old people like me, but I think this is also because of external factors. I have my friends but they are few because the majority of the people who were my friends have already moved. Now I'm biting the bullet and a being flaunting in diplomacy, because as soon as you complain about something you may earn a new enemy. We are already very old to party and our most valuable source of fun is watching television. Nowadays we do not organize parties but that is what most people like, it is the idiosyncrasy of the

Venezuelan people. I appreciate the peace of mind because after 40 years working hard, the only things that I expect are health and peace.

Did you choose to live here?

My mom was the one who chose this apartment. She lived in *Los Caobos* and the building where she lived was going to be demolished by the construction of the *avenida Libertador*, my stepfather got a few alternatives in *el cementerio* but my mom did not like them, so she went directly to talk with Ricardo Diaz Gonzales, President of the *Banco Obrero*, and was looking for a little house in *Coche*. As the houses were under construction, she accepted to rent this apartment as a transition before having the House in *Coche*. My mom was from Cumaná and she disliked apartments because of earthquakes but she accepted this as a temporary solution. That was in the year 57 just before the fall of Pérez Jiménez. After Pérez Jiménez, it became very difficult for my mom to recover the money deposited by the rental of the House and transfer it to a possible House in *Coche* so we were staying in *Cerro Grande* for a longer period paying rent. After some time paying rent, I suggested to my mother to take action to stop losing money paying rent in a moment when real estate properties prices climbed steadily. In the end, I ended up buying the apartment in 1980. My mom transferred me in a document the awarding of the apartment. It was the year 1982-83 when the building was transformed into condominium and the Condominium Board was created. An awareness campaign was made to encourage people to form a Condominium Board and start paying a monthly fee. At that time, the INAVI transferred the building to their residents. The deterioration has increased because many people did not contribute with the common expenses. There are people who do not have the mentality to live in

condominiums. Nowadays we do not have water two days a week and I think it is because of the new urbanisms in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The everyday challenges are to withstand the abuses of the people living in the slum and also boys who smoke pot that among other things, toss plants pots off the corridors. We had to install security cameras in the new elevators. There are neighbors who put their dogs to defecate in the hallway. Now we have the local police and they make a lot of noise day and night. Here we live badly. As all the shopping and retail has left for good you should go elsewhere to do shopping, there is no pharmacy and bakery for example. There is only a Chinese *abasto* (corner shop) that sells very expensive goods and that is why you should go elsewhere. My sister is in charge of the shop but has been struggling with insecurity. Life has become very difficult in this sector.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

In the past, during Christmas the halls were painted, they were Christmas trees, allegories on the doors. That ended because addicts sometimes seize and break them. My family tradition was to meet on New year's eve but we have not done it since my mother died. That tradition was ending because when you came to visit this building there is no parking. This building had a huge parking lot, but was almost removed entirely when the school across the street was built. There was an empty lot besides the building where people used to meet and play but that area was deteriorating over time.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

Many people have done this atrocity, changing the apartments. I have a friend who is engineer and another one who is expert evaluator and always told me to not remove bedrooms as many people have done here. There are people who do not realize that this was designed in an efficient way. I have made the closets, I installed bars. I do not have an open balcony but a railing.

What elements would you like to change?

I would like to have a person in charge or a Concierge so I know where to put the complaints. There have been floods because broken pipes in the stories above. Sometimes the owners of those apartments do not have or do not want to assume the expenses that are the result of bad work done on their properties. I had to invest 5 million (5,000 BSF) in repairs recently. There is nobody to find accountable when problems arise. In the past, we have had problems with the events of the 4th floor. Once, we could not sleep and had no response from the President of the Condominium Board when we called complaining. On the ground floor, they had to put bars because they were very unsafe. The police came but it did not solve any problems.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

We could not move to a House because we are two elderly people who cannot take care of the cost and maintenance. Given the opportunity, we would like to move to a small two bedroom apartment that would be easier to clean. I have many expenses because I need many medicines.

Other testimonies

Nowadays parents do not want their children to be reprimanded by strangers. The police have tried to introduce order because the parents are not controlling their children.

Pérez Jiménez built many infrastructures in a short period not only here in Caracas but also in Maracaibo.

The building was of gray colors, overhangs were white. The first time they painted the building they used horrific brown colors. I remember when they opened the tunnel and we suffer much because of the noise. Later, former mayor Antonio Ledezma commissioned to paint it again but the Green paint used was of very poor quality.

I like to see people like you taking care of this building as I think it is very important

CG6

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
46-60	F	3	NO	COL	Private	Apart	NO	CG	A	2	TO	1958	41-60

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The building is great and you cannot find a more comfortable apartment. As times passes, the community has been deteriorating, I have lived that process. I believe there are not apartments as comfortable as these. I have been in *Parque Central* and I think *Cerro Grande* is better. I think the best features are the apartments and the corridors. Here the corridor is a recreation area.

I like the privacy of the apartment layout because I can receive visits in the upper level without disturbing the bedrooms in the lower level. One thing that we need is an extra

bathroom, now it is not an issue but at some point we were seven people in this apartment sharing just one bathroom. The windows are spectacular, they are big. The staircase is ok it seems to have the right incline.

We were few families, like three or four that are considered the founders of the building. People that had moved recently is more apathetic and less minded to contribute to the maintenance of public spaces, I always remind them that the good of the common areas contributes toward the market value of the apartment. I have been many times president of the Condominium Board and always look forward to contribute with the building.

Because of that some people complain that I see myself as the owner of the building, and I tell them that yes, I am, because I was born here and have lived all my life here. I remember when my Mom took us to laundry in the 4th level. We were organized according to our level to use the laundry. There was a specific day for us to use the Laundry. The laundry was closed when I would have like 10-11 years. When I was 15 years old, I remember the mountain in the back with vegetation where I was going with friends to make excursions. On Saturdays, we went to the mountain. My dad used to play *bolas criollas* there. There used to be a farm where we to buy fresh eggs.

Unfortunately, many of these things were lost in time. In the mountain somebody used to put us a screen one day a week, and a film was projected on it. There was an infrastructure to burn garbage that included a diesel tank at the top. There, it was placed a screen in a rudimentary way and a projection was made from the 4th floor and we watched the movie from the corridors. The people gathered like in rural towns to watch the movie which were usually Mexican.

Did you choose to live here?

I was born in the building. My father chose to live here. There were two attempts to move, one was when we grew up and needed more space. He went to *Coche* and we visit a House but my mom did not want to move. After that, there was another attempt to move into *Horizonte* but there was the 1967 earthquake and this particular apartment building was affected so my parents decided not to buy. My sisters moved eventually. I decided to stay because my mom we convinced my husband and me to stay with her. At the end, in consensus with the brothers, we decided that I can keep with the apartment. I would like to move but not to stay in *El Valle* because now is very difficult to live here. I hope one day I can depart from Caracas to Valencia because part of my family lives there.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The noise from the *barrio* is terrible. The music starts on Thursday and does not stop until Sunday. It is a problem that we do not have control. Other issues are the deterioration and the new people who moved in the building. Trash chutes are all broken. The truck passes sometimes or not. However, the service has improved recently.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

On Christmas time we often had real good years. Some years we have encouraged people to decorate their doors. We have organized *parrandas*. One of our neighbors is a singer and after December 15 we organize *parrandas*. As for the mother's day, we have had events so many times in the 4th floor; we once brought mariachi and boleros.

Those events were possible with the contribution of residents and the condominium. For the children's day we have done events with clowns also with the collaboration of residents. The fourth floor is restricted because the neighbors believe that the rails are dangerous for children. The fourth floor is closed to prevent people to loiter there. But we also use it for dance therapy, etc. This area is available for the neighbors to rent for children's Parties and not for other events because recently there was a *quinceañera* and the party continued until early morning bothering many neighbors.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I have not put bars. I changed windows for sliding doors without bars. Only in the window of the kitchen I have bars. I lived the earthquake here and was traumatic because there was a fence in the entry level and people accumulated there as the *Banco Obrero* custodian was nowhere to find. There were people screaming, somebody with a tool had to come from the nearby construction site to open the gates. The bathroom was remodeled, we get rid of the wall that separated shower sink and now it looks wider. We remodeled the kitchen also. I keep my terrazzo floor because I think it is the best. I also keep the original bars next to the staircase. I put a closet under the stairs.

What elements would you like to change?

The first change that was made when I was young was to the building entrances where they put terrazzo floors and bars. The rooms in the first floor were also built. Those premises were built when I was 17 years old, around 1977. Elevators were changed in the 1990s. The roof terrace was used before. The problem of the roof is that there are

no bathrooms but was used anyway. For a while, we did the dance therapy on the terrace and we go there for the 5th of July military parade to see airplanes. We want to fix the sidewalk to the front of the building. Trash chutes need to be replaced. I have no problem with parking because I am one of the founders of the private parking. Those who pay at the beginning only gave 100 *bolívares*. The parking's gate was built with that.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would not like to live in a house; I would search for something similar. I like to live in an apartment although I often complain about my neighbors; in general I can get along with most of them.

Other testimonies

CG7

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
46-60	F	2	NO	SEC	Public	House	YES	CG	A	12	O	1986	21-40

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The structure is spectacular, is from these times, generous, open with a great panoramic view. It's not a dark building; it is in a great location. A person told me 13 years ago that this building was built using advanced anti-earthquake design. It was finished in 1952 and was inhabited in 1955 and was aimed at the military. Urban legends say that there was an underground connection between *Cerro Grande* and the *Fuerte Tiuna*. In the fourth floor there were 36 washers and 36 dryers, there was organization so people know when they were they turn to use the laundry. INAVI has an

office in the sixth floor to administer the building. When I arrived in 1986, the INAVI was not administering the building and a neighbor called Alonso Alvarez was in charge of collecting 20 Bolivars per apartment for cleaning. Neighbors were not that responsive in that moment. So several neighbors and I decided to organize the first Condominium Board in 1986. I moved in April and we started meeting with people who had been living for a long time in the building. AT that time, I look for advice in the office where I was working with a co-worker named Borreglaes. He was a specialist in the subject. I brought him to the building; he charged us 1440 Bolivars for the accounting books and all the Condominium Board legal documents. This was in October 1986. At that time, we met with the INAVI to make the latest repairs. In that year there were 3 rented apartments about to be evicted, I stopped the process and helped those three neighbors to negotiate their apartments. The condo bill started with 34 Bolivars and is now about 350 Bolivars. No one believes that there are 36 apartments in each level. Somebody told me that this building is a replica of a building that was in Italy.

It is really comfortable, everything, the apartment covers the requirement of a 4-6 people household, and other people have added an additional bathroom and laundry spaces. I have a water tank in the closet next to the bathroom. The building has an incredible water system.

People have not changed a bit since I moved. We are good people in the way we care for each other. The majority is catholic. There were conflicts when we put together the Communal Council. There are good people with values. I know many of my neighbors and even people from the low-income sector that moved to the building. Since we are going to the communal systems all sectors should work together. We work together with

the *19 de Abril* and *5 de Julio* sectors, they are behind the building. I talk to people in these sectors and we share the same problems such as dirty streets and water problems because we are served by the same pipe.

Did you choose to live here?

When I was living in *San Jose de Cotiza*, we decided to move out because of the unsafety. I worked in the Hospital Vargas. My mom has some savings so looked for an apartment here and talked to the owner. Afterwards I worked to create the Condominium Board so I consider myself a creator of it. I was the one who came up with the idea of raising walls in the ground level to hide the trash rooms. I spent one year waiting for my credit approval.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

We have been overcoming many conflicts related to culture and norms of coexistence. All those conflicts have been surpassed because there is maturity. Here we do not have problems, maybe some kid that looks weird but you know his parents and try to help. There are not that many issues with trash as there are with water, because the piping system is very old. It is a serious issue because every time we have water cuts, pipes will break as soon as the water returns. Water is rationed these days. Other than that we do not have power cuts, elevators are good, we installed cc cameras. We have control.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

Holiday celebrations have changed for the worse. People left the building in Christmas to go with their children elsewhere. The building is lonely and desolated. That also happens in Carnival, Easter and so forth. The Condominium Board organizes events in mother's day. I am going to talk about an unfortunate event in the *19 de Abril* community. Some days ago, a young kid was killed. Roughly 30 policemen went there and killed it at his home. It was a very popular person but a Pablo Escolar type. It was a territorial problem and we are in the middle of it. Here you can also find drugs issues but I find that is not government's fault but lack of good parenting. Other than that everything is fine. I work to improve the link between the Communal Council and the Condominium Board because we depend on each other, we should care for each other. In the Communal Council we organize activities to improve access to credit for women and I organized a grammar workshop as I am specialist.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

When I came here the apartment was already renovated, it was not in its original setup. I fix the doors. I installed a 570 liter water tank and pump so we always have water. I fix the closets and the flooring. I have a range in my kitchen with no oven because I think ovens attracts pests. I have my washer in the lower lever. You cannot hang your clothes in the main façade but in the back one so I have a *tendedero* (clotheslines) there. I open the balcony because the former owner built a lower wall there. I put panoramic type windows. I put a handrail in the staircase because my daughter fell once.

What elements would you like to change?

What I like the most in the building is the terrace because I think is a unique feature. This building has a Heliport (?). I like that it has terrazzo, Pérez Jiménez did it good. I would change the entry lobbies because I do not like the way they are. I would get rid of the bars that neighbors put in the ends of the corridor because those are common spaces. There is a lot of wasted space in the ground level. We do not have recreational or sport areas. We have three shacks in the back, two of them are trash rooms and the other one houses an old pump system. We cannot move that system because is heavy machinery.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would prefer a house in the event of moving, although I could consider this apartment as a house. We were thinking about selling these and other two apartments in the family and buy a house but not for now.

Other testimonies

What is my favorite level? Not all corridors are the same. The cleanest one is the ninth. The corridor with most living issues is the second because all the problems lands there, it is less stressing to live in the 12nd floor. Second floor is the warmest and it is close to the trash. The building has 13 master pipes. In every level serves two duplexes and a 4-bedroom.

CG8

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
46-60	F	9	YES	COL	U	House	YES	CG	B	9	TO	1958	41-60

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The building is great. Rooms are spacious; the kitchen is big, unlike contemporary apartments. This was built for the military, when we arrived there was plenty of them. The building used to have its own power plant. Now water comes directly from the city. This building was better maintained before because the INAVI hired elevator operators and custodians, but now the quality of life has deteriorated. INAVI built the spaces in the ground level and lease them. Due to insecurity, people closed the entrances with bars. There are bars everywhere even in the staircases. They appeared gradually. There were not washer and dryers in the apartments but as soon as the ones in the laundry room started to have issues we bought our own. I have mine in the kitchen.

There were not bars in the corridors, but now there are too many.

There are people contributing with the building and others who do not. I know a lot of people that have been in the building for many years but not too much those who arrived recently. I spent a lot of time in my place. I have been in the condo board two times. My relationship with the community is normal but there are some people that talk in my back. There are people that left their apartments in despair so you cannot expect them to contribute with the building's common spaces.

Did you choose to live here?

My parents bought this apartment to the *Banco Obrero*. We were given an option to buy a house in *Coche* but my mom wanted to live in an apartment, my mother in law too. It was considered part of the ideal of progress.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The problem is the lack of reliable water supply service and the insecurity related to the *barrio* surrounding the building. There is not insecurity inside the building, here I feel safe. Another problem is the decay of the building. A trash chute is broken. The terrace should be renovated so we can use it.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

The people who decorate the corridors and their doors are always the same. There is a group that asks for contributions. In the sixth floor, which was the one with worse conditions, there was a contribution to improve it and they did it well. There are very few events. Some time ago there was a bingo to collect funds to fix the sidewalks. I use the spaces in the fourth floor to hike.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I changed the balcony window and put bars. I put one in the lower part to separate ourselves from our neighbor (?). I renewed the kitchen and bathrooms. And I fix the windows. I made the closets

What elements would you like to change?

I would love for us all to have the same balconies. None of the spaces in the ground levels works for the community. We have two parking spaces. The building should have its own gated street, so people who live in the *barrio* could use the other street. The terrace in the roof should be closed because is very open and dangerous for kids.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

We have not considered moving. My husband does not want to move. We meet each other here and we live in my husband's apartment. My mother lives in the apartment where I grew up. Here many relationships were formed among residents.

The building was grey/beige colored, every column of doors were of the same color is a vertical order. The building was painted in green during Antonio Ledezma's government

Other testimonies

In the past, INAVI was in charge of all expenses until the Condominium Board was formed. Life was different before, there was a milkman for example. Life was very healthy before but now there is a lot of decay. A man with a projector used to live here and we had screenings. Many celebrities lived here such as actors Raul Amundaray, Mirtha Perez, Toco Gomez and many journalists. Jose Luis Rodríguez used to visit this building.

CG9

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	countrys	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
35-45	F	8	YES	SEC	U	Apart	NO	CG	A	12	TO	1977	21-40

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

Is a very ample structure, it was considered very modern in its time but now is in decay. The corridors are spacious but there are a lot of apartments per level. The common area is well ventilated.

The apartment is big and comfortable. We are two families living here, my brother, his wife and two children plus me, my husband and two daughters. When the children were

little there were a lot of issues with the staircase so we had to control the access to it using a moveable barrier. It's very comfortable because there are social and private areas area well defined. There is privacy between the levels; the only issue is when a visit asks you for the bathroom because the privacy is broken.

This is like a roller coaster, is depending on time, on the season. There's equal amount of young and old folks. This influences in the perception of the community. Kids are rascals. Since this is a large structure common areas are very busy. Older people like to spend the day outside their apartments. On Mother's day and Father's day there are a lot of people visiting, but there is not enough parking for them.

Did you choose to live here?

I was born here and I have not moved because I can't afford it. I would be so happy if I were able to take my apartment out from the building and move it somewhere else.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

One problem is the running water rationing. The building had four pumps when it was built. Water service is irregular and pipes are outdated so when water goes and comes back there a lot of broken pipes. Also, parking is a problem. There is a private parking for some neighbors. My father was one of the people in charge of creating the private parking. They did a budget and a survey first and then they built it and put a fence on it. We have two parking spots there. Trash chutes are in decay. I do not see issues about having kids here as I no see difference compared to other buildings. The fourth floor is used for children parties and I have been in two of them with my kids but I am scared

because I think the railing is insecure for kids. When I want to take my daughters to a playground I go elsewhere because this neighborhood is not good for girls.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

The building changes during Christmas depending on the Condominium Board. In December, we organize ourselves to paint the corridor. Sometimes, we have organized events in the fourth floor in which neighbors sell arts and crafts. There have been also events organized by the municipality. We had a fair once in the parking and people contribute to it. The corridor is often painted; the community is very proactive on this issue. My brother has been a member of the Condominium Board.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I got rid of the bars next to the staircase and built a 1.3 meter high masonry wall. Originally the kitchen door faced the entryway but we closed it and open a new one facing the balcony. We put sliding glass in all windows. We put bars in the balcony but not in the bedrooms' windows. The washer is in the lower corridor connected to the bathroom. The little closet next to the bathroom we use it as storage. The bathroom is remodeled. We got rid of the wall that separated the sink from the rest of the bathroom. Flooring is the original terrazzo.

What elements would you like to change?

The corridors should have bars; it is very delicate to have the corridors open with the kids. The staircases should be better ventilated and lit. In the back of the building you

might create something like a playground. We used to have a green area but we lost it to an invasion. We need to fix the parking and so forth but we need people to invest in the building.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would move if I found something better

Other testimonies

During the *Caracazo* the building was taken over the military. For us as children that was an unusual experience like being in a movie but over time I have a different feeling about it.

Compared to other buildings this is very big and the apartments are spacious and comfortable. All apartments that I visit are very small.

CG10

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	countrys	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
35-45	F	8	YES	SEC	U	Apart	NO	CG	A	12	TO	1977	21-40

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The building is very comfortable. The apartment is very comfortable, ventilated, big, astounding, well distributed and rooms are large. It is better than contemporary apartments that are very small. My mom likes it a lot because it looks like the House that we had before. It has a big window. We have the *barrio* in the back, but we cope with it. My mom likes that she does not feel locked up. I like that the building is close to everything, we have a mall very close. From here you can mobilize anywhere. We use

the fourth level spaces. I do not like to spend too much time in the corridors but, sometimes I like to talk to my neighbors. In the ground level entrances is relatively safe due to the police office.

Here you can hear the noise coming from the lower levels. There is a car shop downstairs and you can hear the noise from it. In the weekends you see people playing music from their cars and from the *barrio*, and you do not have a choice but to hear it.

In spite of new people moving to the building, the community keeps its old values including respect and communication. I work in the Condominium Board as a secretary. I have always participated in the activities but this is my first time in the Condominium Board. There are poorly educated kids that are not behaving well but you try to guide them. If they break something we try to come to terms with their parents.

Did you choose to live here?

I used to live in a *barrio's* house, I wanted to move but not to *Guatire*, My Godmother who lived here, she let me know about this apartment first. I came as a renter but I was given the option to buy. I was one year rented. I was originally from *Calle 2* in *El Valle*. Moving from the *barrio* to the apartment is a big change. In the *barrio* I used to depend on Jeeps to climb the mountain. Here is wonderful because I can get easily to this building.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

Insecurity is a big issue, so you try not to get late to your apartment. I need to use a taxi very often; I do not feel insecure inside the building. Here you might find some terrible

kids but they do not mess with me. I feel safer as soon as I get into the building. The water is rationed and since the piping is very old we have a lot of broken pipes. We would like to renovate the piping but it is a hard work. We also have a project for the trash chute. We have light bulbs missing in the staircases because some kids take them away. There are two elevators and one of them has a camera. There is a new elevator in the B tower; it was installed one year ago.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

People decorate their doors and the corridor looks very nice. Once we have a *parranda*. There are activities in the fourth floor and many people join. In New Year's Eve, people wish each other a happy new year. There are a lot of events in the fourth floor, nowadays it is used for children parties. In the past, it was leased for all types of parties but there were issues with the noise. We bill 1,000 Bolivars for its use. There is a terms of use of this space, you should leave the space as you find it.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

This apartment was almost original when I arrived. This one does not have a balcony but a big window. I put those sliding windows. I put bars to all windows. I fenced the corridor in front of my apartment and put plants on it. I also improved the kitchen. I moved the door so is now facing the living-dinner so now it is better ventilated. I keep the bars next to the staircase. I built another bathroom with just a toilet next to the existing one. I keep the bathroom's original layout with the sink outside. The washer is

in the hallway between bedrooms. I upgraded my kitchen two years ago and the bathrooms three.

What elements would you like to change?

I would like to get rid of the car shop and the liquor stores in the lower level because that is a mess. There are liquor sales in both the street mall and the street connecting to the *barrio*. On weekends, it is a serious problem, with many people drinking in the streets, even ladies. There is a kindergarten and a police station in the ground level that inspires certain respect. There are private parking spots and we do not use them. The terrace is an ample space but is not used. Long time ago there was dance therapy in the terrace but nowadays we use the fourth floor.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would like to move to a similar apartment but I do not think I can afford it.

Other testimonies

Moving to the building from the *barrio* was wonderful because there is a lot of danger in the *barrio*. My house in the *barrio* was big but that area was very difficult because of the *malandros* (thugs). I had my neighbors and they were good people. My brother still lives there and I barely see him. Another problem in the *barrio* is the rain because *jeeps* (all-terrain vehicles used as public transportation) do not work due to road conditions and there is debris coming down. When I lived there was not that many *malandros* but now is far worse. We are now thinking on moving again because the *barrio* in the back is becoming more dangerous.

CG11

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
35-45	F	3	YES	COL	SE	Apart	YES	CG	A	12	TO	1975	21-40

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

I love the building; the apartment is super comfortable and spacious. The problem is the decay (of the building). This building is great, the space, distribution, is super well ventilated. It is never too warm here, when it is hot you open the door and air flows in. There are a lot of common spaces but are not working, for example on the back we have a yard that if recovered, it will be an amazing space for the kids and elderly people. The fourth floor is used for dancing therapy, is a great place, with great ventilation.

Now we are revamping. My dad years ago installed linoleum on the floor, but now we are removing it and we are going to install marble tiles. Rooms are really good. I cannot complain about the kitchen but will not complain if it were a little bit bigger. The main problem in this building is its location, if this building could be in another place than *El Valle* it will be great.

The community is very apathetic, I belong to the Condominium Board and people do not participate. I organized some fundraising bingo games in order to repair a sidewalk. We did the game but only the usual people showed up. Here live a lot of people since forever, so they should have a sense of belonging. Being raised in the building nowadays, contrasting with how it was I could say it is pathetic. Because I remember that my mom left to work all day long and she left us with a lady and we did not go out.

When my siblings grew up they played in the hallway. I sat at the stairs with my friends to play Barbie dolls. We used the fourth floor for roller skating. Nowadays you cannot do anything on the hallways. The issue is that there is a bunch of new people that moved here and they do not have any sense of belonging to this place. There is a lot of drug and I do not let my son to go outside, he is always with me. There are people that could have afforded to move but stays here. During election time people gather together because people do not switch from their original poll centers. During July 5th (Venezuela's Independence Day) we used to go to the rooftop to see the airplanes. We gather together for elections, December and mother's day.

There's a neighbor on the second floor, he moved to Cagua but every December he comes here. There are neighbors that gather together in Christmas time. I do not complain about the apartment but the surroundings are making me thinking about taking decisions the detail are the surrounding, the zone. The barrio is horrible, it has grown too much, it is like an underworld, and there are so many stories. The barrio's problem is insecurity. Our surroundings are what are ruining the building.

Did you choose to live here?

I was born here, this was my mother's apartment, now she lives elsewhere and I own the apartment.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

Insecurity is the main problem. Time ago a bullet got through my apartment in the middle of the night. The bullet crossed from my bedroom to a freezer that I had in the lower level. In January I bought some steel tread plates and my husband welded them

to the windows facing to the *cerro* (slum). I was terrified inside my own apartment. What problems will make me leave *Cerro Grande*? Insecurity and running water: I really do not know if it is for so many constructions but they are restricting running water two days a week. Plumbing is really old and they frequently collapse and the condominium does not have funds for paying it. Here, you can have a good relationship with your close neighbors. It is something very Latino, I get to know my closest neighbors. We are many people from the time in which I grew up and it is something meaningful. People are apathetic but they act different when an emergency arises.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

The apartments have bars in all the Windows but the bedroom facing to the back, where the clothing line was. The washing machine is inside the bathroom, my brother closed the closet of the room that faces the back and expanded the bathroom. I removed the bars that were on the side of the stair. I build a wall because we are going to do another thing there. My mom moved to an apartment in Valle Abajo and I consider that this apartment is much better, more spacious, with more privacy.

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What elements would you like to change?

I would like that the garbage ducts were changed, that the façade were fixed because it is horrible, that the pump lines were fixed. Also we have direct gas line but the system require maintenance. We do not have water tank, the tap water comes directly from the city. There were some original water pumps in the building. fourth floor had to be restricted, could you imagine if nowadays stairs are used to get high how it would be if the fourth floor were open.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would love to move to an apartment, we are not considering moving to a house, it is not an option.

Other testimonies

When I was a kid I used to go to the hallway, it was not as dangerous as you cannot get shot; back that time there were not any shootings. There is nothing for kids in here that is absolutely denied. I take my child to my mom's place where they have private security and a playground. My son can stay with his aunt or my neighbor just in a strictly urgency.

CG 12

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
18-25	F	4	NO	COL	Private	Apart	NO	CG	A	2	TO	1990	21-40

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The building is spacious, it has a community room, shops in the lower level, I think that is cool, but it have deteriorate too much and we have the barrio barely gets inside the

building. Here at the 2nd floor you can feel more the proximity with the barrio. I like that the apartments are big, two-story, the social and private areas are separated. I like that very much.

The kids, the Young people what they do is bothering others; they smoke and drink in the hallways. But neighbors are generally good people. When I was younger people did not spend time in the hallway, even there is people that cook barbecues. I used to visit my neighbors in their apartments, without music or bothering other neighbors.

Did you choose to live here?

I was born here.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

About insecurity, it is a problem that if you want to get to the building you must go through a Street where there is a *Taguara* (low-class bar) where people gather to drink. If you arrive at night you have to go through that group of people. The parking lot in the front fills too quickly as the people from the barrio is parking in front of the building. The barrio has been consolidating and it has been taking space for the potential expansion of the parking lot. Houses are adjacent to the private parking lot. Water service is restricted on Mondays and Thursdays. Since the building is old, water pipes break when running water service goes and comes back.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

On Christmas the condo board always decorates every hallway and the elevator's lobbies. Christmas is different because people come to visit, people are friendlier, and people say hi and hug. There is an increase in interaction.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

We have the washing machine close to the bathroom door, in the space between the bedrooms. We've fences at the door and windows. Windows are the original ones. Kitchens and restrooms have been renewed with new ceramic tiles. Floors are terrazzo. We kept the fence next to the stair. In the window that faces the barrio we installed a metallic mesh.

What elements would you like to change?

I would change the building's stairs, as they are away and closed, I do not know what happens there and they look too dangerous. There are no emergency lights in the stairs. I would change the stairs so they would be in the middle [of the building] or install windows. The back part where the garbage hut is, I think that place could be recovered and turn in it into a little playground. Once, there were some improvised sport courts, which is used sometimes but not frequently.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would consider a similar apartment but not in the same area.

Other testimonies

CG13

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
35-45	F	4	YES	COL	Private	Apart	NO	CG	B	2	TO	2003	20-10

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

I like the building's design, how it is build. This is durable constructions because they support, and a lot. I say it because of the columns dimensions. Areas are reduced in some of the cases, for example there are not common areas, barely the hallways. I have never had the opportunity to rent the fourth floor community space. That is new because there were a pre-school. I have never been in the roof top.

These apartments are big, huge, and comfortable. The only thing is that bedrooms are all different. They do not have a clear order like new constructions (buildings). The room that has the restroom is the smaller one which is really weird. The slum invasion is barely new about 4 or 5 years ago. That invasion was supported by the government. The apartments are comfortable are not hot at all which is really good. I have no problem when is hot.

I was raised here and before the neighbors were easier going than the today ones. People were more polite nowadays people have turned really rude. We have lost our sense of community. I say hi to my neighbors, I talk to them; I do my best to have a peaceful coexistence. I participated 2 or 3 times in the condo board. Last time I was part of the board, its president was not respectful so I stepped away.

Did you choose to live here?

I was about to get married and my husband had a daughter. Ingrid was the one who told me that there was an apartment and we decided to come back. So far it was not so bad.

A lot of people would like to live in one of these apartments but it would be better to take the building out of the area.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

When running water is rationed there are problems because the plumbing is old. When the power is off we need to take care of people entering the premises from the *barrio*. Once one person from the *barrio* climbed one of the circulation towers and fell off, he got hurt very bad. There were a lot of power outages before but now the service is better. The problem with trash is related to attitudes. People renew their apartments and throw the debris through the garbage chute. Our main problem is education of the community. Parking is an issue, I have a parking space but I rented it.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

Recently, we cannot do many events because there are a bunch of rascal kids that likes to sabotage, and that includes breaking Christmas ornaments. There is a group that fights relentlessly to keep traditions but is challenging.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

Most improvements were done when I arrived here. I have done minor arrangements in the restrooms and the kitchen. I had a roof over the window placed by the lady that sold us the apartment. I have the washing machine in the kitchen. I have to replace the tiles in the restrooms. I renewed the kitchen three years ago. I had not change the terrazzo floor at all.

What elements would you like to change?

The metropolitan government is repairing the elevators. The others two where fixed by the Caracas' Municipal government, but those are for lower traffic. The ground level floor is damaged and requires repair. We have a shop that is under renovation. The Cuban doctors were there once.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I have always dreamt to live in a house. I grew up in a house. In a house you have more privacy. In the apartment you cannot make any noise because you bother your neighbors.

Other testimonies

My son does not have any friend in the building. Kids have to be kept locked at home. Playing in the hallways was prohibited long time ago because hallways are bedrooms' ceiling.

The surveillance has improved because there is a police station in the ground floor.

CG14

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr	Time Spent
61+	F	7	YES	SEC	U	House	NO	CG	A	12	TO	1961	20-10

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The building is good; the only thing that is not so is the back, that is plenty of *ranchos*, with good and bad people.

My apartment is beautiful, it have 3 bedrooms, restroom, dinning-living room and enough space. Other apartments out there are pretty small. My sister live at the buildings nearby and those apartments are small. *Cerro Grande* does not have comparison with that building. *Cerro Grande's* areas are better; especially the hallways that are a spectacular space were you can be. In contrast, where my sister lives after the door is the exit out.

The community is like I said before composed of good and bad people. We do not mix too much with the neighbors. I know my closest neighbors here in the twelfth level. With everything else is just a polite hello. I am participating in both the Condominium Board and the Communal Council. I am in charge of overseeing the overall cleaning and canvassing. In the Communal Council I oversee the health issues.

Did you choose to live here?

I was born here and got married here, and had my children and grandchildren. I got married with a neighbor

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

Now we have a hard problem which is to walk the entire hallway to throw the garbage through the only working garbage chute. Also, we have a problem with the kids that harm everything. I feel safe in the building even though vandalism, the problem is the *cerro* where sometimes there are problems including shootings and bullets getting into the apartments. We also have problems with the running water. We also have problems with a crack head that put a rancho downstairs. There is a parking lot but is not enough for the whole community. We have two spaces as my husband was one of the parking

lot promoters. But it is a problem for new residents. We also have problems with the plumbing which breaks very often because it is very old.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

I am involved in Christmas events. We are five or six people working on that, nobody else. But we leave the building during Christmas time. There are no other events because people do not celebrate anything. I have not used the spaces in the fourth floor for myself.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

We changed the entrance's bars for a wooden one. Balcony was small in a corner and we switch it for a double window panel. There are bars in the balcony. Bedrooms have the original windows. I did not install bars in the bedrooms. We switch the kitchen's door and changed the tiles. We changed the door because we wanted more space in the entrance space and now that it is in front of the balcony airs better. The washing machine is in the downstairs living. I had it before inside the restroom but took it out. In the restroom, I tore down the wall dividing the sink and the toilet.

What elements would you like to change?

I will change the area where the garbage is picked up. The ground level was changed for the better.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

We will move sooner than later to a house. I am feeling bad because I have been living here since I was a child but I like gardening. We still do not know what to do with this apartment.

Other testimonies

Life used to be beautiful when I was young. Before, there was more solidarity. People used to gather in the corridors and we used the roof top for exercising and the fourth floor for parties. We still use the fourth floor but it is more controlled. There was a little school on the fourth floor where my children studied.

My son is 14-years old and he barely interacts with anybody in this building. His high school is in another area. He is very dedicated to baseball.

When I was a girl I used to play in the corridors but now the kids are very rude.

Compared to today's kids, our parents were more responsible about our education.

My husband lived in the *barrio* when that community was better. We fell in love when we were kids. For him, moving here was like moving from hell to heaven. He is a humble man and keeps his friends in the *barrio*.

23E1

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
35-45	M	8	YES	COL	Public	N/A	NO	20/21	4H	9	TO	1969

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

I like the spaciousness of the building and the apartments. It was built with materials that make you feel comfortable inside. I compare it with previous buildings and I see

that *23 de Enero* is better, it is cooler. Since there are three corridors we have a lot of opportunities to interact. The fact that we see each other in the elevator increases the sense of community. Also the fact that there are many stairs gives a lot of options to get into the building. Unlike conventional buildings, this one has 10 possible entrances and you can move in between stairs and hallways. People used this feature in the past when running out from the cops.

The apartment has a limitation because it has four rooms but just one bathroom. The kitchen was big but not enough for that many people. Another limitation is the trash chutes, as they were made of a thin metal, they rot easily. All buildings were losing trash chutes as they were falling apart.

Community defines life in *23 de Enero*. Sometimes we talk about the “concrete jungle” because you find anything going on here. We have achieved a balance between our differences. Here you find a criminal, a professional, a student, but we all coexist. Solidarity is at its highest here. I have an aunt who is a professional and college professor and she does not want to leave because she feels safe and knows that her neighbors are taking care of her. There is a strong sense of community and individual values are not as important. I like to compare it with our native Venezuelan indigenous communities, this is like a *Shabono* (an indigenous type of collective house), where some neighbors has an open-door policy so people can stop by and chat, and has a coffee and so on. That is something that I have not seen outside *23 de Enero*, including the many places in which I have lived. There is this concept of “mutual protection”. Even those who committed crimes were taken care of by the community when they were in jail. We did not condemn them. While is true that this is a big community and there are

places in which all 23 *de Enero* residents can coincide we identify ourselves according to our building.

Next to our building there are two large schools and a pre-school. My building, the block 20-21 was surrounded by schools. Just next to the pre-school there was a street mall that was very active in the pre *caracazo* times. After the 1989 looting they have not been the same. The owners of those shops left the community for good. For us that was traumatic because we considered them as part of our community. The *caracazo* had a strong impact on me, because I think that was the day we lost our social integrity. It was a spontaneous violence that clouded our vision about the long term consequences. There was a lot of collective regret in the aftermath, we feel like we should not have done that. I was a community leader in that moment and I remember I was called to mediate but when I arrived to the place was too late. There were reasons for us to be upset at that time but the looting was not the answer. There was not point to harm Jose's business to steal his goods and destroy his store. That day, not only the social pact between the people and the State was broken but also our innocence in the struggle. From that day onwards a new ideal of pacific demonstration was defined by the community in order to avoid making that mistake again. Those were difficult days, although many people organized *sancochos* (soup gatherings) with a lot of liquor as all the liquor stores were looted first.

Did you choose to live here?

I was born here

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

There have not been considerable problems with the electricity. A direct propane gas system was installed 20 years ago. At the beginning there were many issues with the gas as you need to buy the cylinder and move it to the apartments. When the system was installed people was afraid of an explosion because of the frequent shootings, but never happened. There has been a pervasive issue with the sewage system due to the *barrio* settled on the building's green areas. As today this problem is not that significant but we are still concerned about it.

A main challenge that we faced when building a peaceful coexistence was the crime, which in *23 de Enero* was linked to illegal drug consumption and trafficking. That was the issue that affected us the most. The building was very dynamic as it has many entrances and circulation options, but that also promoted other problems. It was common to find people doing drugs in the stairs. At some point, it was said that the superbloques will be destroyed not by an earthquake but because of drugs. *23 de Enero* was considered a hot bed for subversive groups and urban guerrillas and that was exacerbated by the building's layout. During the 80s, it was very normal for us to see the community taken by the military and its heavy weaponry. Here people always feel safe about speaking their mind and protesting and that might have been defining our identity to the rest of the city. We were in permanent conflict with the political establishment defined in the Betancourt era and the following governments, particularly in the first two periods. During Betancourt and Leoni there was a lot of repression. The Police broke into my house two times. We broke our pact with the government, if there was any, as we never feel that we had a fair treatment.

In this moment we have one elevator in the *bloque 20* and another in the *bloque 21* there were brought from China. The municipal government financed those elevators; they also painted the building with many colors. Not all the buildings in *23 de Enero* have been refurbished. *La Cañada* was improved by the government but the buildings in *Monte Piedad* not. Internally, the community organized to improve the areas. There was a court opened in the Lusinchi's government (1984-1989) but is now useless as it was built over sewage drenched lands. Recently, a high school closed in the 1980s was re-opened. I see a lot of improvement in the building but there are still issues such as people urinating in the stairs. We still have the issue with young people linked to drug use and trafficking. There is political tension due to polarization, although some Communal Councils have incorporated opposition-oriented people. I am editor of *Colección Bicentenario* (Elementary School textbooks). As we broke with the state in the 1960s people did not enrolled their kids in *23 de Enero* public schools so there were not a community-school identity. There were even liquor stores next to the schools.

The Communal Councils are trying to work together with both the community and the state increasing participation. We are renewing our pact with the State but not yet with the private sector. There are no big supermarkets in *23 de Enero*. There used to be one but was looted in 1989 and it never came back. There are small bodegas in some hallways so there are other ways for people to get groceries inside the community.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

There are not too many changes during Christmas. There are not special decorations, just a tree in the entryway. Residents decorate doors. During New Year's celebration people use to gather in the hallways to wish happy New Year to each other.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

The bathroom was changed; we put a door in the shower and new tiles. We put bars and new windows to replace the original *macuto* windows. We put ceramic tiles over the terrazzo floor.

What elements would you like to change?

I will look for a solution to the trash issue, meaning an efficient collection system. This is an old building so there is a permanent need of maintenance but the trash issue is the most important. Trash chutes and elevator are external features of the buildings that need to be taken care off. Some communities have closed some spaces and the building now has a sole entrance. I feel safe in the community as I know many people in the community, not just in my building.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I continued living in *23 de Enero* after moving from my parents' apartment. Later I moved away because of the crime and violence among young people. Not violence against me in particular but among people. However, you never feel like you left the community even if you live somewhere else. When there are elections we always return to the building because we don't like to move our polling direction. We accept each other no matter our differences and we build long lasting links, like families.

Other testimonies

One of the toughest things I experienced is to have half of my acquaintances and friends killed when I turned 21 years old. We are five who survived from our generation and we often gather to celebrate that we are alive. The expectations and the quality of life of the new generations are better than ours. Today parents are more concerned about their kids.

We felt excluded before, living in a *ghetto* in some kind of *apartheid*, so we searched for ways to encounter each other. Music helped in that process and parties were organized in apartments. Every year there was this big event in an apartment. As there are no options parties were always in apartments and if you were very noisy you should expect to have open doors for people to join in. I have never been in the roof. Once a children fell from there and since then going there is considered a taboo. A very common custom in my times was to whistle as a way to communicate that problems were coming such as police raids.

23E2

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	countrys	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
61+	F	3	NO	ELE	SE	House	NO	17	3H	7	OO	1958

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

Well, I like it all, it is well located close to the subway and we never have *zaperocos* (disturbances) here, we always have direct water and trash collection. But there are

other buildings that are a sanitary threat as the trash collection is not complete.

Sometimes is a problem here too.

I like it because is comfortable, the living room is big and the kitchen and bedrooms are comfortable. Nowadays, apartments are very small, just around 55 square meters. This apartment is very large. At some point we were 10 living here when all my seven children lived here. I used to go to the little square with my children and they all attended the *Jose Maria Vargas* School. There were many events in the school so there was no need to go elsewhere. Longtime residents are well behaved; the problem is the new generations. Apartments located below corridors are bigger compared to the two-bedrooms located in the corridors.

Neighbors used to be better; we knew each other and were polite. Nowadays, new generations are not well behaved. I used to be a very close friend with a neighbor and I have not had any issues with other people here, but there are neighbors that avoid you for political reasons. In this building there are many *Tupamaros*. I have been in the Condo board. Now there are Communal Councils working for the government. These Communal Councils have almost substituted the Condominium Board but is not like they do a great work either. In the past, I used to work in the city and barely got to know my neighbors. Nowadays, there are a lot of issues with neighbors. When the dictatorship collapsed people took over unfinished buildings in *Sierra Maestra* not in my sector.

In the past, there were elevator operators but now we have the Chinese elevators.

Common areas are cleaned with condominium money that was also used to pay the lift

operators. But now we are in charge of cleaning the building. There is not concierge but the Condo board president.

Did you choose to live here?

I was the first person to move here. When I was signing this contract, I was inquired about the number of people in my family so they assigned me a 3-bedroom apartment. You were not able to choose your apartment. I loved my apartment from the beginning; there were still construction debris in the building when we got in.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The main problem is security although things are calm, police is no longer here and *Tupamaros* are in control. There are a lot of drunks in the ground level. We care for each other. Trash is an issue because the collectors do not pick up all the trash when they come, so we are having pests such as rats and cockroaches. There are not supermarkets nearby so I do my groceries in the Avenida Sucre. There are people urinating in the common areas.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

I do not see events in the building. In the past, there were many events in the little square nearby.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I improved the kitchen and the bathroom. I built closets and new doors. I changed old windows to sliding ones; I also put bars on the windows.

What elements would you like to change?

I would like to change the corridor's flooring to *caicos* (clay tiles). Sometime ago, they improved the hallways using funds collected in a bingo, they put ceramic tiles on the corridors. They should put a fence in the ground level.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I always liked a house better. My daughters are trying to make me move out from here. I do not want to go because here is very convenient as the subway is right there. There are also buses going to many places in the city. I do not feel unsafe here.

Other testimonies

The roof is not used for any activity; I would not go there for any reason.

My brother used to live in the 20-21, the double *superbloque*. That building is worse because there are many more people living there, it is crazy. There you can see all sorts of problems because there is all kind of people. In these four buildings we live better.

This complex was originally called *2 de Diciembre* but the name was changed after the dictatorship was overthrown. In this government, *Tupamaros* took control and the police are gone for good. When we arrived here there were no ranchos because Perez Jimenez was clearing the slums and moving people to these buildings. Nowadays we

have ranchos all over the place. Before the Subway was built there used to be a creek called *Carlota*. The subway was built over it after they canalized the creek.

23E3

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	countrys	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
46-60	M	4	YES	COL	Public	IH	NO	16	3H	10	TO	2009

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

This building is beautiful, although has a lot of years but it is well preserved. They were designed with good natural ventilation and daylighting. Apartments are very comfortable and the rooms too. There have been changes overtime, for example trash chutes were originally inside the building and direct gas was installed. This building where I lived is one of the best in the complex, it is in very good condition. The majority of Neighbors contribute to the building. Seven years ago, the building was improved by the municipality in a project that included the participation of the community. In the past, renovations and other projects were done without having the input of the community or doing a thoroughly evaluation. The government came, talked to the community, made a diagnostic and then completed the constructions, including landscape.

I live in a 4-bedroom comfortable apartment. Some improvements were already done and it is already very beautiful. We do not have issues with the water supply and power. The majority of the apartments here are in good condition. They are very well lit and natural ventilation. For us there is an extra room that we used as a study. I have a band and we meet here very often.

There is a lot of politeness among neighbors. I came from the *barrio* and I have many links with that community, my mother still lives there. In contrast, I organize activities with the building's community and it is often difficult to have a good turnout as people prefer not to get involved. While in the *barrio*, people interact more and you see people hanging out in the street and talking to each other, in the building people are more reclusive. There is not a significant participation of the community, including the Condominium Board meetings. I think people in the building are satisfied as they do not see major problems. The last major issues were the elevators, and once they were installed people stopped caring for the community. Another issue is the neighbors with pets because some of them excrete in common areas. This building is relatively small compared to others in *23 de Enero* so it is not difficult to get to know your neighbors. In those huge building in *El Mirador* the disorganization is more visible. The Municipality is helping with awareness campaigns.

Here it has been difficult to assemble the Communal Council. There are Communal Councils already in the Barrio and in other buildings. There is a neighborhood association and people seem to be satisfied with it. Communal councils are necessary to articulate the community with the government. I have not participated in the Condominium Board; their members are usually elder people with many years living here and retired so they spend a lot of time in the building.

Did you choose to live here?

I was always living in a house so I was always very curious about the buildings. My destiny brought me here. First, I lived with my wife in the 52 which was much

deteriorated, and then I moved to this apartment in *La Cañada* and found out that the Municipality was refurbishing the buildings.

We searched for an apartment in *La Cañada* because it is very close to the subway and is calm compared to other sectors in *23 de Enero*. In *23 de Enero* there are well defined sectors like the barrio *El Observatorio*, where crime is rampant. Here is very convenient close to Avenida Sucre. We found this apartment through a friend of mine because in *23 de Enero* people often do not put their apartments in the real estate market because they are afraid of criminals moving into the buildings. I meet the previous owner and he was very nice to us.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The Main issue is personal safety; we have tried to assemble a safety committee.

Another issue has been the water supply but has improved after some maintenance was done in the water tanks in the roof. Here in this building and the 15 we are almost free of water issues. About personal safety, you feel safe when you are in the building and the barrio is not a source of crime. Some time ago this was very dangerous. Now the *colectivos* Alexis Vive and the Coordinadora Simón Bolívar are in charge of security. A positive factor is the amount of basketball courts so sports helps people to be away of crime. We also organize cultural activities. Here we have a park for parties. In the building 16 there is a swimming pool that was originally maintained by the government but is now under the neighbors 'administration and many activities are organized there.

A pervasive issue in *23 de Enero* is drug use and trafficking, particularly on larger buildings. In this building we have an issue with a very poor family with many social issues that ended up with neighbors organizing themselves to evict them.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

Christmas here is special like in the rest of the country because is part of our nature. Here, people organize to clean the building and put decorations and trees. There are parties in the hallways, decoration of mangers and lights. It is a bonding experience and people interact more in those days but is still different compared to the barrio because people stay more in their apartments.

I am getting along very well with my neighbors. I organize cultural activities, among them the *Paradura del niño* (A post-Christmas tradition popular in the Andes region) in which people open their doors for us to perform and offers traditional food and wine. People respect each other and they know I am at their disposal to help.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

Changes in the apartment were done when we moved in. The original floor was terrazzo but we changed to ceramic tiles. It has new windows and bars. I disagree with some improvements done by people in their apartments. I think that changes should be regulated as this is the work of Carlos Raul Villanueva. There are people who have built above the elevator bridge's roofs. In my apartment the previous owner extended the existing window in the living room. The ventilation wall in the kitchen was sealed. I

remember that people used to put small color tinted jars in the ventilation wall. We have a small window in that wall.

What elements would you like to change?

For maintenance policies, the present Condominium Board does not allow people using elevators after 10:00pm, I disagree with that. There should be elevator operators and a gardener. Another issue is that the condominium bill is very low so we cannot have money for projects, people do not want their bill to be raised. We are proposing to increase the usage of an underutilized space in the building. People should be educated more with regards of the trash disposal, there still people throwing trash over the windows. We do not have a car but there are parking spaces for all neighbors in a space that was set as a private parking.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I like houses better because I care for animals and plants. We could consider a similar apartment but I would prefer a house.

Other testimonies

During the *caracazo* I was living in the barrio *el observatorio* and working in a bank. People here went downtown to look for what they thought was theirs, for what it was denied by the society, they did not considered themselves as looters. In *23 de Enero* there were stores that people did not loot but others were event burnt to the ground. The repression started on February 28, 1989. Police, National Guard and the army participated, it was brutal. The army put machine guns and shot the buildings. Some

neighbors organized themselves and fight the National Guard. People here did not feel like criminals, they thought they were fighting for their rights. We were stigmatized as looters but instead we felt like we were the victims of a nationwide looting. While the rest of the city was in calm, here the struggle lasted for a week. Then they started to raid the apartments. Recently, the community organized ousted the police because they inspired fear rather than safety. The *caracazo* was the beginning of the end of the *cuarta republica*. Those who survived the repression in the 1980s we feel blessed as our lives changed for the better when Chavez came into power.

Here you can find many values, people that have been working all life. We organize the three wise men parade which is considered cultural heritage. We feel proud of our community. We know that we have been stigmatized due to urban guerrillas but on the other hand, you can find many positive things too.

23E4

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
46-60	F	7	NO	COL	Public	House	YES	19	4H	10	TO	1998

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

Apartments are very comfortable, built 50 years ago, but with a technology far ahead of those times. I have been told that the build have movable foundations to mitigate earthquakes. Apartments are well ventilated. Since more or less 30 years ago you see similar apartments built but very small, very difficult to move large furniture. The kitchen is very spacious; many people can fit there at the same time. There is just one bathroom and since we are two families sometimes is not convenient but we have worked things out.

In the building where I live there are 150 apartments, is one of those called simples. It has a good access and allows community interaction. Is not like contemporary buildings where people isolate in their apartments. Here, the building layout stimulates more interactions among neighbors. That could be beneficial or not, but when there is a good coexistence is enjoyable. I do not like apartments in the hallways because of two reasons: first, they are smaller and second, they are exposed to noise in the hallway.

The majority of people living in this building are persons that have been here since the beginning of the neighborhood, most of them coming from the countryside. They are already grand-grandfathers or mothers. There has been some mobility as people have passed away or simply moved away and new people have been taking over, in some cases bringing positive attitudes but in other cases they do not behave as expected.

There are issues implementing regulations and keeping the building clean.

My community expands beyond my building. Here in *La Cañada* there's a lot of community projects particularly that promoted by the Communal Councils. I cannot give an opinion about larger buildings like the 20-21 as I do not know many people there but I can imagine that there are more problems there as many more people live there.

Did you choose to live here?

More or less I am here by choice. I used to live in *El Junquito* and was working in the national Library. I was transferred from a library in La Vega to a one located in *23 de Enero*. Also I meet a person who later became my life-partner and his home was here so I moved with him and his family.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The main challenge is for new generations to achieve coexistence in the same way previous generations did. The Condominium Board works on the definition of cohabitation regulations to improve the awareness on the maintenance of common spaces. This building was extensively renovated by the municipality. The municipal government used participatory tools to implement a plan of action. They are working with younger generations to increase the awareness about the value of this community and the building. We have not had any major issues with power but water supply is not as regular as it used to be because there is a nationwide shortage.

Concerning trash disposal, there is a regular Schedule of collection but there are particular problems with people throwing trash out the windows. Transportation is great; we are four blocks away of the subway. We do not have a car. There are problems in the parking lot concerning outside people parking there. With regards of security, *La Cañada* is very safe. I have been living here for 15 years and working for 20 years and I have not had any problems even when I come back late at night. In the library, we organize events until late night and never have experienced any issues. I feel safe in the building and do not hear any troubling noises at night.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

There is a covered walkway between buildings 18 and 19, in which people do a lot of everyday activities; there is an intense community life. We have a *café Venezuela* nearby attracting many people. During holidays such as Christmas or mother's day there are events with music. There are a group of people that is in charge of organizing

these activities. There is a *Colectivo* called *Coordinadora Simon Bolivar* contributing to fund and organize these activities. The Library is in charge of organizing traditional holidays such as Cruz de mayo and La *Paradura del Niño* with a good turnout.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

The apartment where I live is almost original. The only significant changes are the expansion of the living-room window and the closure of the ventilation wall in the kitchen where they put a big window. Almost all windows have bars. The living room and the bathroom have ceramic tiling in the floor and bedrooms have their original terrazzo floor.

What elements would you like to change?

I never have been in the Condominium Board. I do not propose a physical change but an increase of the community awareness on topics such as the use of the common spaces and trash disposal. People have been controlling themselves during parties so I would say that coexistence has improved. The coexistence between the *barrio* and the *superbloque* is very peaceful with no rivalries. In the library we attend people from both the *superbloques* and the *barrios* and they work together peacefully.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I like this sector but since I am not living in my own apartment I have considered too search for a new apartment. I would like to stay in this sector.

Other testimonies

Since I came here, all buildings have bars installed. Since the municipality Project “Caracas Socialista” was done all neighbors have electronic keys to Access the building

and the elevator. We have two relatively new elevators. One was installed by the Condominium Board no so long ago and the other one put by the municipality. There were two elevator operator but the Condominium Board cut expenses and they were laid off.

I can speak about the changes in the community life since Chavez' *misiones* were implemented. In the Library we worked in *Mision Robinson* and I was surprised to see that many people in need to learn to read and write. I was impacted by those experiences as I was confronted with a reality I was ignoring.

When I came here from La Vega I was feeling punished, but overtime I have learned to love this community

23E5

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
61+	F	6	YES	SEC	R-Private	Apart	YES		19 2H	4	OO	1966

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

Compared to contemporary buildings this complex is an experience that it should be replicated, very well built. Compared to contemporary apartments, my 62 square meter apartment looks very spacious with very comfortable rooms. This apartment faces the hallway and that's where I see a possible flaw because I think the hallway is too big. If the hallways were narrow maybe I could gain an extra room. The structure is in very good shape. The elevators are very good. The ones installed by Perez Jimenez were great, but now we have new elevators, hope they last long because you need to be

chasing people so they care about the common goods. The building has walkways and landscape in the ground level. There is a little square for people to gather. I do not use it very often as I always coming late from work. Utilities are working well and we have many public services nearby such as hospitals and location is great because you have many connections to other places in Caracas.

We are six people living here now because my son and his family are here temporarily while they wait for an apartment in Charallave (Outside Caracas). We call *superbloques* the buildings with two or more modular units. Among all *23 de Enero* sectors this is privileged. There is a lot of respect for the *Colectivos*. When the *Caracas Socialista* plan was implemented by the Municipality the neighborhood improved significantly. This was in decay before that plan because many people do not understand the significance of this place. The Kitchen has the same measures of a bedroom, it is quite big. I would not do any major change in the apartment like other people who have transformed the kitchen into a bedroom.

We need to take care of this place because this is a great location. The community is good, manageable, there are not bad neighbors, and we care for each other. I do not have friends but many acquaintances. I talk to them but I do not interact with them because I am very busy. There was a time in which we had many burglaries. After those events, a group of neighbors organized themselves to fence the staircases. We know that this was not an ideal solution because there may be issues during an emergency but we got our project approved and now our section of the hallway and the two staircases are locked.

The kids gather in the Little Square, there is also a big court, a library, and so on. My granddaughter does not use these spaces too often because her parents think that they might be dangerous. It was a similar situation when I was raising my kids.

Did you choose to live here?

My mother in law used to live here. My father was friend of my in-laws and he sent me to live here from Puerto La Cruz. I meet my husband who was living in this house and we married. We moved and lived in other places but ended up here again.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The challenge is to excel, that people behave and value their homes because this will be a legacy. I think we are very fortunate compared to people in *barrios* but not everybody is aware of that. There are people throwing trash out of their windows. The trash collection is frequent. We clean the hallways two times a month. The staircase is also cleaned by the neighbors. There is a gardener for the landscape areas paid by the Condominium Board. Parking is an issue because the parking is used by four buildings so it is very difficult to organize.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

People decorates their hallways, *colectivos* organize events for the kids including a Santa Claus. There is an *abasto* (Corner store) down there that is affecting the community because it selling liquor and food. There is a lot of noise and they bother us. On mother's day and children's day the *colectivos* organize great events.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I have the original terrazzo. I opened a window in the kitchen because I need light. Before, there was the ventilation wall but I changed it because I prefer to have more daylight.

I changed the original aluminum Windows for sliding ones. There are bars in all windows. I built two closets around the column next to the entrance.

What elements would you like to change?

I do not know how to answer

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I do not like houses because I am older and I have not energies to take care of one. I would prefer to move to another apartment.

Other testimonies

When INAVI transferred the administration to the neighbors we felt abandoned. There is a lot of respect between people living in the *superbloques* and those living in the barrio.

23E6

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	countrys	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
46-60	F	6	NO	SEC	U	N/A	NO	19	4H	11	TO	1963

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

The building has five staircases, 14 stories and the elevator stops in four levels. These apartments use to have the trash chutes inside but they were moved to the outside.

When people do not use the chutes properly garbage starts accumulating on the façade.

Here in the building, the community organized to improve the ground level. Long time ago, INAVI built a nice landscape in the ground level that we eliminated because of its decaying. The ground level is fenced so now the building is private and we all have key, this improved life maybe a 60% because there is still people that does not adapt well to community life. Here, the majority of people are joyful and talkative. It feels like family in here. People mix a lot here, there are marriages among neighbors.

My apartment is big, comfortable, I have four bedrooms, kitchen, and I built my own laundry space. I merged the bathroom and the sink space and added the laundry. It is well ventilated, when I open my bedroom door, air flows all over. It is well lit too.

Did you choose to live here?

My father lived in *San Agustín* and he came to *23 de Enero*, thanks to a friend who was living here and rented him a bedroom. Eventually, this person transferred the apartment to my father who then formalized the transaction in the *Banco Obrero* and started paying the mortgage.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

A problem that has been increasing is crime. *La Cañada* is a relatively crime-free sector and it is close to the subway, but lately it has been rough. There are drugs and we know who are those who go the back of the building to do drugs. Not so long ago, a neighbor was killed close to the building and another one close to the 20-21 building. Here, in the

ground level, there have been two assaults already. The *Colectivos* do not inspire respect but fear; it is not like they provide security because there is still crime around. When the fences were put the security increased because neighbors were not robbed in the hallways. With regards of children, I always sent them to the basketball court and never let them to play in the hallways. I learned to whistle so I can communicate with them; it was the pre-cellphone era. We used to have regular water supply but there have been problems recently as water is rationed more often. Like other neighbors, I installed a water tank to cope with rationing. Trash problems are generated by the community when they throw garbage out of the windows. We do not own a car. Parking is difficult because many buildings depend on one parking. The *Coordinadora Simon Bolivar* is in charge of the parking.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

In December, we (the people in the Condominium Board) decorate the building's common areas with lights. Christmas is the only moment in which the building changes for the better. A neighbor in the second level puts together a manger with other residents' contribution. February the 2nd is *Candelaria* day, when people pick up the manger and get together potluck style. In that event, the neighbor who builds the mangers dances *la burriquita* (a traditional dance) for us. This group plays music all over the building during that event.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

We put new ceramic tiles in the bathroom, the kitchen and the laundry. Flooring is original. 39 years ago my family changed the windows for sliding ones with bars and *toldos* (canopies). In the kitchen we shut the ventilation wall holes off because dust was getting in the apartment and our upstairs neighbors made a mess in their kitchen once and liquids poured into ours through those holes. My father used beer cans to close those holes first and eventually shut them off using cement.

What elements would you like to change?

I would like people to be more aware about the value of this building and embrace it with some love. We should have a strong awareness campaign to achieve that. Some neighbors do not understand the value of this building. We have a gardener that does a great job but the landscape gets dirty again in no time, although this situation has improved recently. We need the other elevator too.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I was thinking on moving soon because I wanted better options for my kids but it was not possible then. At this point I no longer care or it. I do not like houses, if I were up for moving, I would look for a similar apartment in a better place.

Other testimonies

In the *23 de Enero*, people treat each other with respect no matter if you live in the barrio or in the buildings. During the *Caracazo* we lived a rough repression by the police and some apartments were raided.

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
46-60	F	7	NO	SEC	Public	IH	NO	17	3H	14	TO	

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

I think the building is marvelous, I grew up here and I know a lot of people, I greet and smile with people. I know this neighborhood very well and I feel safe within it but not as much in other areas of *23 de Enero*. Here we have a lot of issues with trash because people do not know how to use the chutes. There are people who do not adapt to life here. We like to contribute with the cleanness of the building.

There used to be very good elevators installed during Perez Jimenez but they decayed overtime and we started having issues. But now we have two elevators, one of them is refurbished that is not working and the other is a Chinese elevator installed by the municipal government. Hallways are overall clean but our main issue is pets excreting. I know my neighbors, some of them have passed away but I keep contact with their families.

I have a three bedroom. I think is wonderful and would not trade it for one those built nowadays. The natural ventilation is great; an air conditioner is not needed.

Did you choose to live here?

I used to live in other sector within *23 de Enero* before moving with mother and my family to this building. My mother died, so my sister and I took charge of our family. At some point we were seven living here but we never had issues. At the end, we decided that I should keep the apartment.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

Trash is the main problem. Trash chutes work fine because they were repaired recently but still you see people throwing trash out of the window. Utilities work regularly but recently we have more water cuts, however they are announced by the authorities. Parking is also a problem as there are not assigned spaces for residents and *Colectivos* are doing their best to organize it. My husband drives a car but often when he arrives at night he cannot find a space. About personal safety, I feel safe in this building but it is true that *23 de Enero* is not a safe place, but that is a nationwide problem. I also try to be safe by not coming back late at night because there has been assaults in the buildings.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

The building's landscape is decorated in Christmas; this is done using contributions to the Condominium Board. I decorate myself but not all the years. Sometimes I put a tree, lights in the window, I put an effort for Christmas to be meaningful every year. Over the year, we have events organized by the *Colectivos*. I do not see significant events on Mother's day as they used to be. It also happens that I am not an event enthusiast as I am very busy. I see that neighbors gather as a family for celebrations such as birthdays. I also see that neighbors prefer to spend more time in the building rather than going elsewhere.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

I have one bathroom, I improved it some seven years ago, when I decide to merge it and put the sink inside it. I eliminated the ventilation Wall and put a small window. I shut

down the holes in that wall. We renovated the kitchen with new fixtures. I have done two improvements in the kitchen. I also put new windows with bars. I covered the original terrazzo flooring with Linoleum which was offered by a company to many neighbors with finance options.

What elements would you like to change?

I have not been in the Condominium Board but my husband was there once and was not a good experience for him as there are a lot of people complaining. Despite I live in *23 de Enero*, I like to live well and do the right thing.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

I would not change this apartment because is spacious and comfortable. My husband owns a house outside Caracas for 20 years already and we have not moved there. We go there often for short stays but we have decided to keep this apartment.

Other testimonies

23E8

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	country	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
46-60	M	4	NO	COL	Private	House	YES	19	3H	1	OO	1955

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

This building is very good. In spite of its age, this is a well preserved structure. We have been always trying to preserve and improve our apartment. The electrical system works fine and the water supply has issues because it is very old. The hallways are spacious and wide. This building has a landscape in the front in good conditions. There is a

square that we call the revolutionary square; there is also a *Bulevar* with a pair of kiosks. Is an advantage to live in the first level (second from the ground level) as we do not need to depend on the elevator. My mother is very old and she cannot walk that much. A disadvantage is that you are closer to the noise which is something normal in *23 de Enero* because people gather to drink and play music on the street, always until midnight. This apartment has the original terrazzo flooring; we renovated it some time ago.

The apartment has good natural ventilation. The windows are big and we have a great geographic location and orientation. The Sun does not hit the apartments directly. A negative change is the progressive loss of many eucalyptus trees which were beneficial for health. Overtime these eucalyptuses were changed for other types of trees, more decorative. We use to have rubber trees too.

This is a community with an embedded revolutionary psyche, which have been evolving since Perez Jimenez until the present political situation. This is often an inconvenience because people assume a defensive attitude. In *23 de Enero* exist a love/hate duality in the way people relate to each other; on the one hand there might be conflicts between people but on the other hand we are very supportive. This is like a tribe; if an outsider has a conflict with somebody all the members will defend their own no matter what. This is something present in all organizational levels in *23 de Enero*. We always feel like a group, even if conflicts are present in between different sectors within *23 de Enero*. There are cliques within *23 de Enero* such as the sportsmen. The *Catía* market is a place in which all *23 de Enero* residents concur and recognize each other. Between both building and barrio residents there is a sort of mutual acceptance and we respect

each other. *Barrios* expanded since Romulo Betancourt's government and since no government has put in practice effective policies they are still expanding. There are differences among *barrios*, for example the *Bloque 8* community is less problematic and better consolidated compared with *Camboya*. Houses are better in the later. I would not say that those differences are based on socio-economic status but rather in people's attitudes. The *barrios* are born when Perez Jimenez is overthrown and rise due to state paternalism in the democratic governments, setting a bad example for early building dwellers who were obliged to pay rents. High density buildings brought many social issues because it's too many people together. I compare it with buildings in Paris which are much smaller. Density is the main issue in *23 de Enero*.

There is a difference between Barrio Sucre and other informal settlements in Caracas in the way people there have high-end technology devices so you ask yourself how that is possible.

Here, your neighbors usually end up as your best friend or as your family. I consider my neighbors like my younger sisters. Is an enjoyable experience here with this community when you let people stop by your house at any moment. There is fraternity and camaraderie among neighbors.

Did you choose to live here?

My mother and father lived in *Los Frailes* and I was a newborn when they moved here. My father was a military driver. When construction started, my father saved enough money for the down payment so they went to the Bo and they assign them this apartment. My father did not have too many options to choose but the sector and the

apartment level. In that moment, there was a very organized and efficient system in pace for planning and implementation.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

Trash is not a *23 de Enero* problem but a citywide one. I feel safe inside the building because here we have a security system that does not exist in the city. *La Cañada* is a very safe sector. Here you will not see robbery but you might find “arreglo de cuentas” (vengeance-driven crime). If you have a misunderstanding with the wrong person you will be gone for good. At this point I see the *23 de Enero* as one of the safest cities in Caracas.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

The building changes in Christmas. Some kids decorate during Christmas which is more than an event. People contribute to improve the building appearance. There are many parties in this month and people become more peaceful compared to the rest of the year. There are events over the year, mainly related to revolutionary characters. They are designed to reinforce the ideological foundation of this community.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

We keep the original layout of the bathroom but we have changed the fixtures. The ventilated walls in the kitchen were set for security reasons because people used gas cylinders before. My mother shut off that wall and opened a window. Windows were changed for sliding ones and we put bars as well.

What elements would you like to change?

Rather than changing something, I would like to improve existing issues such as trash collection, although this problem is beyond community control. Improve community rules, people needs to know that one thing is to be a revolutionary and other is to be abusive. Regulations should be applied to everyone and they should be promoted through workshops and seminars. Law should be applied indistinctively.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

For me, moving from *23 de Enero* would be like moving to a different country because it would imply a change in my life systems. It would also be more expensive as living in *23 de Enero* is very convenient.

Other testimonies

I am not interested in a car because I have lived in other countries where the car is not as important and public transportation is good. In the *23 de Enero* going in and out is not an issue as it was very well planned. Buildings are conceived as a defensive system. Hallways are designed for people to protect themselves and have vantage points. I see that you have not noticed this. The ministry of defense was located in this sector so they conceived these buildings as part of the defensive system. You will see that the majority of the early inhabitants in the *23 de Enero* were in the military. When you enter the *23 de Enero* you will be facing the facades with the corridors.

Compared to other low-cost housing development that I know such as the ones in the periphery of Paris, France, where segregation is very evident, *23 de Enero* have

evolved ideologically and now is relatively calm. At the beginning, when Perez Jiménez it was a para-military ideology (far-right). Then, during the bipartisan period it changed to a leftist ideology. In this context, the revolutionary that is born in the *23 de Enero* is working toward our own integrity. It is not a revolution attitude based on ideology but rather by default, because you were born here.

A distinct feature of *23 de Enero* is that you find many courts and schools. In the past if you were not a sportsman you were dead socially. *23 de Enero* has nurtured many educators. In this urbanism we have many schools; I can count three around my building that cover all levels of elementary and secondary education. Every building has features that allow a healthier living. A great Chess master Antonio Palacios was born in this very building and we organized chess tournaments. Now is different because newer generations have a different relationship with the environment.

23E9

AGE	SEX	N.people	Children	Educ. Lev	Employ	Htbefore	countrys	Building	Apt type	Apt level	Ownership	Year of arr
26-35	M	5	YES	COL	Private	N/A	NO	52	3H	6	TO	1980

How do you like the building, apartment and community?

About the building I would say that is old so sometimes has issues related to that such as leakages, power outages and so on. We take care of it as a community, when a lightbulb is gone in front of my apartment we change it ourselves. *23 de Enero* has a school and a court close to every building. You find spaces for the community to interact. This building has accessibility issues. I need to do a long walk from the bus stop here. I need to walk the whole building; this is a double-block, to find the elevator.

Common areas in this pathway are dirty. They are cleaned almost every morning but they get dirty very quickly. The façade looks better than before; it was painted 12 years ago more or less.

Apartments in *23 de Enero* are bigger, even compared to similar building in private estates. The apartment is comfortable because is spacious. I have good views to the city and its valley. It is well ventilated and we do not need and air conditioner. The kitchen is spacious and keeps its original sink. We do not have a dryer so we dry clothes inside the apartment.

There are plenty of good people but bad people are more visible. There are things that you find in popular sectors such as people playing loud music. In this building people is not united or organized like in other sectors in *23 de Enero*. Here people are skeptical about the Communal Council and overall there is a lot of apathy. People discuss a lot about community expenses. This is a double-block but I do not think that community issues are related with the number of people as I see that in the triple block nearby is better maintained and people are more organized. I do not have close friends in this building because I prefer to have my friends away. My father advised me to do so. I know people in other sectors and in Caracas but I avoid hanging out in this building. My family has a similar attitude, we are polite with our neighbors and we are willing to contribute but we do not socialize too much.

Did you choose to live here?

I was born here. This is my parent's apartment.

What are the major challenges of everyday life?

The trash problem is the main issue here because impacts sanitary conditions. Crime is another issue. There are issues with *Colectivos* that are not everyday challenges, but for examples *Colectivos* awake all people here Sunday morning using loud megaphones. Here you can find some retail nearby like a bakery and an *arepera* (arepa store). Another problem is liquor, particularly on weekends. Drug trafficking is not as problematic as it was before. Drug issues have been decreasing due to *Colectivos* actions. Police does not enters *23 de Enero* since long time ago. The problem of trash is not about collection but about people not disposing the garbage properly. Is a problem related to values. Parking is no longer under control of the building and that is an issue. We share it with nearby houses and if you get here late, most likely you will not find a place.

How is the building different during Christmas or other holidays? Are there celebrations?

Christmas is atypical. We have five consecutive years with shitty Christmas because somebody from the community was killed or passed away. There is a somber environment. In December, most people travel and you do not see too much people in the building. There are frequent events on Mother's day and children's day, Community Councils and *Colectivos* are in charge of these events including temporary markets.

Have you done changes in the apartment? What changes?

The ventilated Wall in the kitchen was renewed and we put a window. I remember some pipes in the roof that were eliminated. We have changed the ceramic tiles; the sink

stays outside because we found this layout more functional. We keep the terrazzo floors and put new windows.

What elements would you like to change?

Community participation needs to be improved. Around 30% of the people here do not contribute to the building. There should be better maintenance and improve common areas with more plants. Staircases should be lit all the time because this is one of the buildings with more problems in the staircases. There are random sections in the staircases that are locked with bars by neighbors. It is very difficult to find your way up or down when the elevator is not working. I think this will be an issue if we have an emergency. People started locking the staircases to avoid other neighbors to use them. Right now this is a disaster.

If you were to move in the future, would you consider a similar apartment?

For me it would be ideal to move out but stay inside Caracas

Other testimonies

These buildings were built by Pérez Jiménez who was, in my opinion, the president with the most comprehensive vision about infrastructure.