The Survival of Downtown: Recreational activities with no consumption
Pablo Fuentes and Margarita Greene

(0) Introduction

The competition between traditional downtown areas and malls is one of the expressions of the present crisis, and its increasing relevance. In the case of Santiago, the planning authorities backed up by public opinion, in a series of decisions, have attempted to reinvent the downtown (Fig. 1), improved pedestrian public buildings (Fig. 2), installed public furniture and lighting in an effort to maintain the commercial activity in the downtown. On the other hand, the malls have incorporated a broader set of activities beyond their original commercial orientation, with the aim of increasing the spending of their visitors. Since the late 1990’s, the downtown area has been affected by a series of problems, such as traffic congestion, crime, and a decline of infrastructure, and provide urban, medical and even religious services on Sundays. Fig. 15 shows the evolution of one of the main malls of the city: Mall Plaza Vespucio, in a short period of time.

The importance of maintaining the level of activity in downtown areas needs to be addressed, not only because of the historical and economic importance of these areas, but also to consider that these areas are the only remaining public places where a socio-economic diverse population meets and interacts (Fig. 16). Although access to commercial centers is open and free, they are socially isolated by the area where they are located, and tend to be extremely segregated in socio-economic terms.

(1) The foundational triangle as the integrating nucleus of the city

The downtown area of Santiago, which is called the foundational triangle, has clear boundaries and is easily identifiable. It lies between the Mapocho River to the west and the Paseo Ahumada to the south (Fig. 17). Although it has a well-defined axis of symmetry, it still forms an irregular shape. The foundational triangle is one of the areas where the commercial, financial and culture activities that still occur within its boundaries. In fact, it harbors the headquarters of the main banks and corporations, the main markets, the courtyard of Justice, the Ministry and the Parliament Palace.

The foundational triangle is located at the crossroads of the two major routes of the city: the Alameda and the Paseo Ahumada highway, considering its exchange functions of transportation, commercial and natural kind (Fig. 18). It is considered one of the most visited areas during weekends, even when the offices and most of the commerce is closed. Fig. 19 shows how the foundational triangle has an important pedestrian use, which is difficult to match in any other part of the city.

In a preliminary survey it was determined that the people who live or work in the downtown area to walk or during the weekends, it is a common practice to visit the 20 foundations of the foundational triangle. People also use it to relax, have a break or enjoy the culture activities that occur within its boundaries.

The foundational triangle is considered the main nucleus of the city, as it is the place where people come from different parts of the city to meet and participate in the different activities that occur there. During the week, the foundational triangle is visited by the people who work or live in the city. During weekends, people from other parts of the city also visit the foundational triangle, especially those who live in the suburbs.

(2) Access to the downtown area

In order to determine the magnitude of the pedestrian flow among people who go to the foundational triangle, a study was carried out in the downtown area. The data obtained showed that the foundational triangle has a pedestrian flow of 100,000 people per day. This pedestrian flow is not only due to the people who work or live in the area, but also due to the people who visit the area for leisure or cultural activities.

The foundational triangle is considered the main nucleus of the city, as it is the place where people come from different parts of the city to meet and participate in the different activities that occur there. During the week, the foundational triangle is visited by the people who work or live in the city. During weekends, people from other parts of the city also visit the foundational triangle, especially those who live in the suburbs.

The foundational triangle is considered the main nucleus of the city, as it is the place where people come from different parts of the city to meet and participate in the different activities that occur there. During the week, the foundational triangle is visited by the people who work or live in the city. During weekends, people from other parts of the city also visit the foundational triangle, especially those who live in the suburbs.

(3) Land use

The most frequent programmes are the hotels, the museums, the restaurants, the drugstores, the public administration and department stores.

The small-scale programmes include the markets, the restaurants, the drugstores, the cafes, the bars, the public administration and department stores.

The large-scale programmes include the hotels, the museums, the restaurants, the drugstores, the public administration and department stores.

The infrastructural programmes include the hospitals, the schools, the cinemas, the churches, the universities and the public administration.

The institutional programmes include the hospitals, the schools, the cinemas, the churches, the universities and the public administration.

(4) Space use

When the variety of people who inhabit the downtown area during the weekends, it is possible to recognize certain types of groups. There are people who prefer to spend their time in the downtown area, while others prefer to spend their time in the malls. Some studies have shown that the downtown area is preferred by people who enjoy walking, while the malls are preferred by people who enjoy shopping.

From the space syntax it is possible to analyze the spatial organization of the downtown area and identify the areas where people tend to spend their time. This allows urban planners to design new spaces that are more suitable for the needs of the people who inhabit the downtown area.

(5) Final considerations

The first conclusion to be reached is that Santiago has few places of no consumption, but the downtown area offers the possibility to a wide and heterogeneous population, thereby becoming an important social integrator.

The second observation is that people who participate in recreational activities have a paradoxical nature. Thus, the non-consumption-recreation should be understood not as a separate entity, but as a set of activities with destination (estableishment) programmes.

An additional consideration is that the large and small scale programmes should not be considered in isolation, but as part of a larger system. This allows urban planners to design new spaces that are more suitable for the needs of the people who inhabit the downtown area.

pchaves@gsi.uchile.cl
margare@unesr.cl

International Space Syntax Symposium
London, 29-30 June 2002

Fig. 17. Land use in the CBD

Fig. 18. Map of the foundational triangle

Fig. 19. Pedestrian flow in the foundational triangle

Fig. 20. Pedestrian flow in the foundational triangle