

Figure 13 Location of Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la Republica in Maracaibo



Figure 14 Mother Statue of Plaza de la Madre

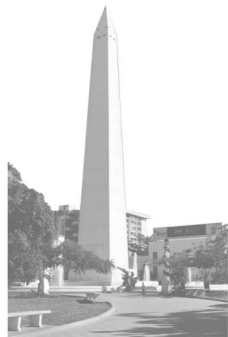
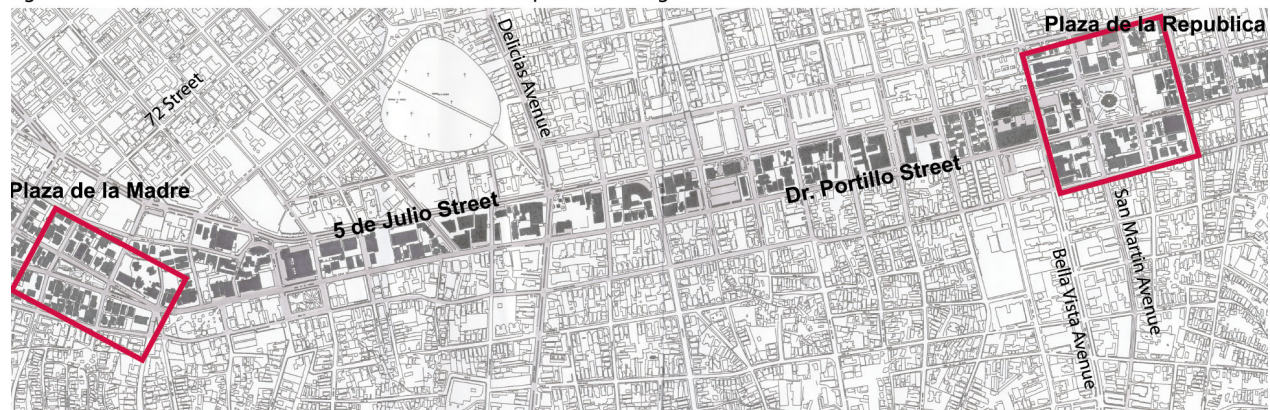


Figure 15 The Obelisk of Plaza de la Republica

Figure 16 Location of Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la Republica among 5 de Julio and Dr. Portillo Street



5. Physical and Functional characteristics of Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República

In order to provide the reader a deeper understanding of Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República, it will be necessary to describe them physical and functionally. This will allow visualizing conditions that may be influencing the vitality and the urban role of both plazas. This will also provide a notion of how the plazas are structured within the city of Maracaibo. The following will include the physical structure of the plazas, the characteristics of physical amenities and the land uses of the surrounding context.

Location characteristics.

Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República are located relatively close to each other and connected through two urban commercial corridors that are 77 Street (5 de Julio) and 78 Street (Dr. Portillo). Particularly 5 de Julio is a commercial boulevard, which is characterized by the location of many retail stores, boutiques and offices, it is a highly visited boulevard in which festivals and special events develop during holidays. Figure 16 shows that Boulevard 5 de Julio is one of the surrounding streets of Plaza de la República. Because of a change in the street layout, 5 de Julio does not connect directly to Plaza de la Madre, but it represents one of the main access points to this plaza from different locations of the city.

Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República, on the other hand, share the Dr. Portillo Street. This corridor is characterized by commercial activities that are mainly hardware and auto-part establishments. Dr. Portillo is also characterized by the lack of vegetation in the public walkway, lack of definition of the parking space and the pedestrian way (see figure 32). These characteristics make this corridor highly uncomfortable for pedestrian use. This corridor is very busy but the nature of the commercial activities taking place and the physical conditions are not as attractive as 5 de Julio Street for people.

Plaza de la Madre is located next to a small public space called Plaza Ruben Dario. This is a very small public space that is separated from Plaza de la Madre through 71 Street. Users generally perceive Plaza Ruben Dario as an extension of Plaza de la Madre and therefore, perceive it as one public place. Rarely is Plaza Ruben Dario used or perceived as a plaza. For this reason, Plaza Ruben Dario is not considered in this study. Plaza Ruben Dario is a vehicular divider; almost a remnant space, which divides the junction between 78 and 77 Streets.

Public space type and physical structure

From a typological point of view both public spaces are squares. Squares are open spaces, which are structured by adjacent buildings, the street layouts and defined by the city blocks. The morphology of both plazas (based on the geometrical pattern of the ground plan) derive from two basic figures, which are a square for Plaza de la República and a triangle for Plaza de la Madre (Krier, 1979). The specific geometry of Plaza de Madre is trapezoidal, which derives from variations of the triangle (structured by the street layout).

It is important to note that buildings enclose three of the edges in Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República. The fourth edge of both plazas is open space. In plaza de la Madre, the open edge (not defined by buildings) is generated by the presence of Plaza Ruben Dario in 71 Street (see figure 22). In Plaza de la República this open edge is defined by the presence of an amusement park, which is a temporal structure that is predominantly characterized by open space (figure 27).

In Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República the spatial organization is symmetrical. The location of the different elements that conform the public spaces is structured in a symmetrical and homogeneous way in all the area of the plazas. The focal point of plaza is the Obelisk, which is a landmark in Maracaibo as the most prominent physical element of the space.