

CHAPTER V. RESEARCH RESULTS

16. Interview Results and Discussion

One most important section of this study is the presentation and discussion of the answers provided by the interviewed participants of Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República. The results are important because they add validity to the research questions made and the methodology used in this study. The research results are structured and discussed according to the different variables that were covered in the interviews. They are as follows: frequency of use, uses and activities, accessibility, sociability and perception of others, user preferences and needs, comfort, which is subdivided into microclimatic comfort and security comfort, respectively, and finally, the user's profile. These variables were selected based on the problems addressed in this study and the literature review. In order to understand this chapter and the answers provided by the interviewed participants in a broader sense, the reader may want to review Appendix III: Table of Results.

16.1 Frequency of use

As discussed in Chapter IV Methodology, frequency of use was asked in order to know the number of times (on a weekly basis) a person visits Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República and to know the time spent there. This information was significant to understanding people's patterns of use and determining if both plazas were highly visited or not. In this section participant were asked about frequency of use, time spent in plaza and times of the day the user visited the plazas.

In Plaza de la República, 50% of the interviewed participants visited the plaza three to five times a week; 32% used the plaza once to two times week. These two answer categories were also the most important responses given in Plaza de la Madre as well. Plaza de la Madre users visit the plaza three to five times a week but at higher frequencies (63%) than Plaza de la República. This frequency of use reflects an almost constant or routine visit of this plaza by these individuals, which is a result of the regular exercising activities taking place in the plaza during morning and afternoon hours. In Plaza de la Madre, the second most significant frequency of use was once or twice a week with a rate of 27%. According to the percentages obtained, Plaza de la Madre experiences more frequency of use than Plaza de la República. Although Plaza de la Madre was constantly visited on a weekly basis, people's intensity of use was higher in Plaza de la República.¹ There was also a greater percentage of users that visit Plaza de la República more sporadically than Plaza de la Madre, specifically once or twice a year or month.

¹ It is important to differentiate frequency of use from intensity of use. Frequency of use is related to the number of times a person visits the plaza on a weekly basis. Intensity of use is the number of people in the plaza studied at a specific time of the day.

In relationship to the time spent in both plazas (question # 2), most users in Plaza de la República stated that one to two hours were spent in this Plaza. On the other hand, Plaza de la Madre experienced an average people use of half an hour to an hour. This means that people spent less time in Plaza de la Madre than Plaza de la República. A greater percentage of users in Plaza de la República were able to remain more than two hours in this setting. The constant people presence during most hours of the day (between morning, noon, afternoon and evening) in Plaza de la República, and during longer periods of time (one to two hours) may be attributed to the presence of more amenities and activities in the plaza. This can also be attributed to the perception of security and natural surveillance (people presence) and police vigilance in that public space.

In regards to the time of the day users visited the plaza, interviews showed that people visit both plazas mostly in the morning hours, but this phenomenon was not reflected through the observations developed in this research. Observations reported higher intensity of use and people presence during the afternoon and night hours for both plazas, which are the peak hours, for both plazas. The high levels of people presence in the morning hours could be based on the fact that more users were interviewed in those hours. Another important issue was that no use was experienced during noon hours in Plaza de la Madre. Plaza de la República experienced constant people presence during most hours of the day, between morning, noon, afternoon and night hours due to the permanent presence of the college students from the Colegio Universitario Rafael Bellosó Chacín (CUNIBE).

The reason for people visiting Plaza de la República and Plaza de la Madre at specific hours of the day, and specifically during the morning, afternoon and night hours, were determined by microclimatic conditions of the plaza and the activities taking place in the surrounding context. Therefore, the more comfortable and cool the plaza was the higher amount of use. Also, people's schedule and available time for enjoying the outdoors determined their chances for visiting the plazas. Plaza de la República was also visited at hours, which were favorable to people's schedule. Another factor, which determined the time people spent in the plaza, was the security conditions present in the plaza. Women especially expressed not feeling secure visiting the plaza during night hours or very late at night due to the menace of criminality in Maracaibo and the perception of this sector of the city as not a very secure place. This will be further discussed in the security and comfort section of this chapter.

Microclimatic conditions were a primary determinant in people's frequency of visit and use at certain hours of the day in both plazas, and specially Plaza de la Madre. Another important factor that determined the pattern of frequency of use was the perception of security of these two public spaces. Plaza de la República had both natural and organized surveillance, which Plaza de la Madre did not have.