

security and climatic conditions. Other things to add were trashcans for better maintenance, parking spaces and more amenities, especially for children's recreation and sports. Some users felt the plaza should be bigger and needed more physical space. Traffic congestion, irregularities in the existing pavement that made exercising difficult and the elimination of the water irrigation system (people are unable to use the walkways in the morning or exercise), were important things to be changed in the plaza. As a way to reconfirm these answers, participants were asked about their likes and dislikes in the plazas. Coincidentally, insecurity in Plaza de la Madre was reconfirmed as a factor that not only kept people from the plaza but also displeased people the most and reduced people's satisfaction. When asked how comfortable people felt in the plaza most people in Plaza de la Madre said that they were happy and comfortable in general terms, especially with the recent physical improvements, and therefore felt very satisfied. Although people felt threatened in this public space due to the characteristics of the sector and lack of police surveillance, the new physical arrangement and constant maintenance of the plaza has increased its attractiveness and image of security in people. Most participants mentioned feeling comfortable in Plaza de la Madre, in spite of the lack of surveillance, perhaps for the fact that they visited the plaza when a lot of users were in it and during day hours, when perception of security can increase. Similar to Plaza de la República, the users in this Plaza also liked elements such as the fountain and mother statue. In Plaza de la Madre people were not pleased with the social environment. In Plaza de la Madre the social environment was not the most important condition in the plaza. Therefore, this plaza is not a socially orientated plaza; it is more of an individual experience public space, for personal relaxation and exercise. The observations confirmed that people were mostly engaged in groups, which increased the opportunity for social interaction in the plaza.

In Plaza de la República, people felt the plaza needed better maintenance, more green spaces and better pavement. Most recommendations had to do with the old condition of the plaza. The sense of security in both plazas is very different. Plaza de la Madre users rated security as the lowest quality present in the plaza, which lowered the users' intensity of visit. Being close to home was more important for Plaza de la Madre users than Plaza de la República users. In Plaza de la República, users come from many different parts of the city, and although strategically located, a high presence of people is attributed mostly to the social role of the plaza. Landscaping and greenery although considered physical-aesthetic attributes, were not included in this category because they are a natural quality of spaces. Plaza de la Madre users were particularly attracted to the landscape ground cover and the presence of trees. Microclimatic comfort was better in Plaza de la República than Plaza de la Madre. One important factor not addressed in Plaza de la Madre but mentioned by Plaza de la República user was the diversity of activities.

Plaza de la República users were less satisfied with the Plaza's physical qualities than Plaza de la Madre users. A recent renovation process, which made Plaza de la Madre an almost complete new

setting, influenced this physical preference among users. In Plaza de la República, the biggest concern was the improvements to the landscaping and the plaza's maintenance. Skaters mentioned that the pavement needed to be in better condition.

Another important question was what user thought should be changed (added and deleted) in the plazas. Coincidentally, both plaza participants affirmed parking space as an important amenity to add. Things to be added in Plaza de la Madre had to do primarily with security and improving climatic comfort in the plaza. Adding a trash can for better maintenance and parking space was also important. For Plaza de la República, improving the physical qualities and maintenance were the most important issues. Due to the larger occupancy during peak hours, some users mentioned parking space and more seating features as another important amenity to add.

In general, people prefer to be in public spaces while other people are present, this was especially important for Plaza de la Madre participants. The previous discussion showed that Plaza de la Madre needs better microclimatic conditions, security and programmed activities. These conditions can attract more people to public outdoor settings and satisfy security, climatic and affiliation needs. According to participants of Plaza de la República this public space needs more maintenance and better physical conditions. In general, participants in Plaza de la República are satisfied with the social environment, the sense of security and climatic comfort experienced in this setting.

16.6 Comfort

Comfort was an issue explored in both plazas. A public setting that is comfortable will allow the fulfillment of a broader range of people's needs and enhance enjoyment, sociability, and passive and active engagement in plazas. Comfort, in this particular study, will be related to climatic conditions and the security factors of the plazas. Therefore, this topic will be subdivided into climatic and security comfort. When it was asked in a general way how comfortable the interviewed users felt in Plaza de la Madre and Plaza de la República answers were basically similar. Users in Plaza de la República mentioned with more frequency that their experience was very comfortable (74%) while 63% of users in Plaza de la Madre felt this way. If 37% were moderately comfortable in Plaza de la Madre, it is accurate to conclude that there must be something wrong or not acceptable for users in this plaza. Therefore, almost a 40% of participants are not feeling completely comfortable in the plaza because of security and climatic issues that will be further analyzed in this topic.

16.6.1 Microclimatic Comfort

In Maracaibo, the climatic conditions are one of the most influencing conditions for people using public outdoor spaces. The severe climate conditions present at certain hours of the day in Maracaibo are perhaps the most influential factor to draw people to public spaces.

When asked if the climate conditions affected people's comfort in the plazas, 80% responded affirmatively in Plaza de la Madre and 60% in Plaza de la República. This question when related to question # 3 (What time of the day user came to plazas) helps explain that microclimatic conditions determine people's use of the plazas at certain hours of the day when microclimatic conditions were comfortable. In relating both question # 3 and #18, the conclusion is that morning, afternoon and night hours were comfortable for people. Particularly in Plaza de la Madre, climatic issues determine people's sense of comfort. Because of the recent renovation, it still has young and very small vegetation, which is not providing enough shade relief from the severe climate conditions, especially during afternoon hours when temperatures begin to soar. Plaza de la República on the other hand, has more mature and taller trees, which provide more shelter from the sun's intense incidence especially in the afternoon. It was observed that microclimatic conditions during noon hours were not severe enough to prevent people from visiting the plaza during those hours. Actually, during noon hours most users were students, who prefer the thermal comfort in the Plaza de la República to the comfort conditions found in their own college gathering spaces.

When it was asked how climate affected the users' comfort (question #18.1), all interviewed participants in both plazas mentioned that climatic conditions determined visiting the plaza at cool hours of the day and avoiding hours that were severe and hot. All users interviewed in Plaza de la Madre expressed unwillingness to visit the plaza during noon hours for several reasons: due to the severe climate conditions of those hours; because the plaza was empty and not secure; and, finally, due to their work schedule. In Plaza de la República, as stated above, use during noon hours was possible, most users during noon hours were students, who felt they could not avoid being in the plaza at that hour due to their class schedule. Although they stated that if they had a choice they would not be in the plaza or in any outdoor space at that hour. Therefore, the presence of students and other people (clerks) at noon hours in the plaza was because they had no other choice. They used the plaza while at work or class break, but they preferred to be indoors with air-conditioning. Twenty seven percent of the participants interviewed in Plaza de la República expressed no discomfort being in the plaza at those hours, but would not use the plaza if it had no trees or if they were not in shade. Therefore, shade and climatic comfort were very important in the public space. Plaza de la República had sufficient adult trees to provide favorable microclimatic conditions in the plaza. Another issue that was confirmed through observation and will be expanded in the following topic was that no user of Plaza de la República was