

## Participatory Action to Make Women Visible in Neighborhood Life<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents the findings derived from the implementation of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, highlighting the current situation of women around positive and negative aspects of neighborhood life, within the sociocultural environment in Analco, Puebla. The importance of women in sustainable development is emphasized through the application of traditional and contemporary knowledge in its social, economic, cultural and political dimensions, which strengthen relationships in community spaces. To achieve this, exploratory tours, identification of social actors, structured and unstructured interviews, mapping and a final reflection of the findings related to women's participation in neighborhood life and their right to the city were carried out. Based on the results, we find the importance of implementing Community Cultural Management (GCC) strategies that promote women's participation and social bonding in a subjective construction of the neighborhood.

**KEYWORDS:** Women; Working Life; Urban spaces; Cultural management; Cultural diversity.

### Acción participativa para visibilizar a las mujeres en la vida barrial

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo expone los hallazgos derivados de la implementación de la investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) y resalta la situación actual de las mujeres en torno a aspectos positivos y negativos de la vida barrial, dentro del ámbito sociocultural en Analco, Puebla. Se enfatiza la importancia de las mujeres en el desarrollo sostenible mediante la aplicación de conocimientos tradicionales y contemporáneos en sus dimensiones sociales, económicas, culturales y políticas, que fortalecen las relaciones en espacios comunitarios. Para ello se realizaron recorridos exploratorios, identificación de actores sociales, entrevistas estructuradas y no estructuradas, mapeos y una reflexión final de los hallazgos relacionados con la participación de las mujeres en la vida barrial y su derecho a la ciudad. A partir de los resultados, encontramos la importancia de implementar estrategias de Gestión Cultural Comunitaria (GCC) que promuevan la participación de mujeres y la vinculación social en una construcción subjetiva del barrio.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Mujer; vida activa; espacio urbano; gestión cultural; diversidad cultural.

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## Introduction

The declaration of the Historic Centre of Puebla as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 marked the beginning of a new economic opportunity centered on tourism. From this approach, policies and actions have not yet satisfied the needs of the popular social sector, particularly of those living in the neighborhoods surrounding the historic center, facing social exclusion.

A case such as the Analco neighborhood, where since its creation it has undergone a physical historical fragmentation, as well as social. Moreover, this neighborhood accommodates valuable tangible and intangible heritage, despite the tourism policies that promote it, this impacts it both socially and territorially, resulting in inequality, socio-spatial segregation, and the processes of displacement or gentrification. One of the leading causes has been a change in cultural and community practices of the residents, due to the introduction of new land uses, migration of native families, and the arrival of new residents such as public servers and outsiders that instill mistrust and debilitate social cohesion.

Since the nineties, with the strengthening of recovery programs of the Historic Centre of Puebla, the government has disregarded what constitutes neighborhood life<sup>2</sup>, of which women and men are essential for its existence. However, from a gender-focused standpoint, it's important to note how the territory goes through change from women's perspective. Given that, despite progress in studies and initiatives in policies towards gender equality at a global and local scale, the marginalization of these women is still prevalent in their complex experience of their city by underrating their contributions and abilities to confront obstacles present in their daily lives. On the one hand, this creates an absence of participation in public decisions, and on the other hand, a lack of appreciation for cultural life in the neighborhood of Analco as relevant elements in the right to culture and the city. For women, accessibility to public spaces is seen to be restricted by physical aspects, urban violence, and the lack of a connection between these spaces. In addition, social backwardness and poverty facilitate their permanence within the neighborhood.

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<sup>2</sup> Neighborhood life is understood as a social process displayed in shared spaces where daily life is carried out and social conflicts arise due to social and spatial segregation, which impact community development.

Nevertheless, communal spaces (public, semi-public, and private) have played a crucial role in women's daily lives, where they create experiences that are a key component to neighborhood life.

The scarcity of awareness and social inclusion within social groups that have an impact on the neighborhood, influenced by a patriarchal lens, hinder the presence of women in spaces destined for expression, coexistence, leisure, learning, and sharing knowledge. Particularly, in Analco, a significant portion of the households are managed by women, who are responsible for the care of children or relatives, thus situating them in a private space and affecting their participation in public and communal life. As previously mentioned, in spite of local governments assuming public policies with a perspective on gender, what is certain is that women require spaces to strengthen their identity and encourage their involvement in joint actions for their well-being, from specificities to diversities.

Therefore, the main objective of the article is to present an approximation of the women's experiences by means of the methodology of the Participatory Action Research (IAP by its acronym in Spanish), contributing to knowledge around their forms of appropriation and critical reflection about social dynamics formed, giving voice to those remaining in the margins of urban policies and actions of renovation for the neighborhood (Flores and Monterrubio, 2016). From this approach to women, contact was established with the *Gestión Cultural Comunitaria* (GCC) (Community Cultural Management) as a process that introduced an initiative oriented towards the betterment of the environment and raising awareness of the living heritage belonging to the neighborhood.

The first section is based on a theoretical reflection addressing concepts such as the visibility of women and the GCC. The second section broaches the results obtained from the IAP that focuses on a socio-urban analysis of the present situation women face in the neighborhood of Analco, illustrated as testimonies, those which are "the bridge that connects and leads to orality of the meaning of life experiences, the protagonism of women, and allows a glimpse to the characteristics of female identity" (Massolo, 1991, p.106). Along with the identification and connection with social participants, as well as an exploration of similar cases where the relevancy of women in a sustainable development

of their communities is emphasized using traditional and contemporary knowledge in economic, cultural and environmental aspects. Likewise, the results of the strategies adopted by the GCC to promote women's participation and social cohesion to identify their needs, are shown. Lastly, the final reflections regarding the findings of the methodological process are presented, as well as the limits, tensions and challenges associated with the implementation of the strategic actions that established the *Mujeres Construyendo Barrio* (MCB by its acronym in Spanish) initiative.

### Methodology

The IAP is a research based on the epistemology of Complex Systems.<sup>3</sup> The IAP is a distinctive approach to Community Psychology that is studied while acting in and from the community. The individuals or groups affected by the problem can recognize its requirements, organizing and taking action to overcome it, therefore participating in a process of empowerment or emancipation. As an external researcher, my role is to promote and become a catalyst for change through action that will intervene and act from and within the community (Garrido, Luque, and García, 2013). Hence, my purpose evolves from observation to action as a manager of cultural activities and a connector with other social actors. It is important to note that the method used is not linear and the results are part of a back and forth between the dialogue of theory and practice.

This study focuses on the contribution of IAP in research, as a first approach to social individuals through a gender focus, which was handled theoretically and statistically. In this sense, the IAP that was created arose from a theoretical reflection that linked female vulnerability to the relevance of highlighting the role of women in the construction of neighborhood life, incorporating the concept of the right to the city.

Subsequently, a socio-urban analysis was conducted incorporating statistics from INEGI's 2020 *Censo de Población y Vivienda* (Population and Housing Census), as well as data from the *Diagnóstico Urbano del Centro Histórico del Municipio de Puebla* (Urban Diagnosis of the Historic Centre of the Municipality of Puebla), obtained by the *Programa*

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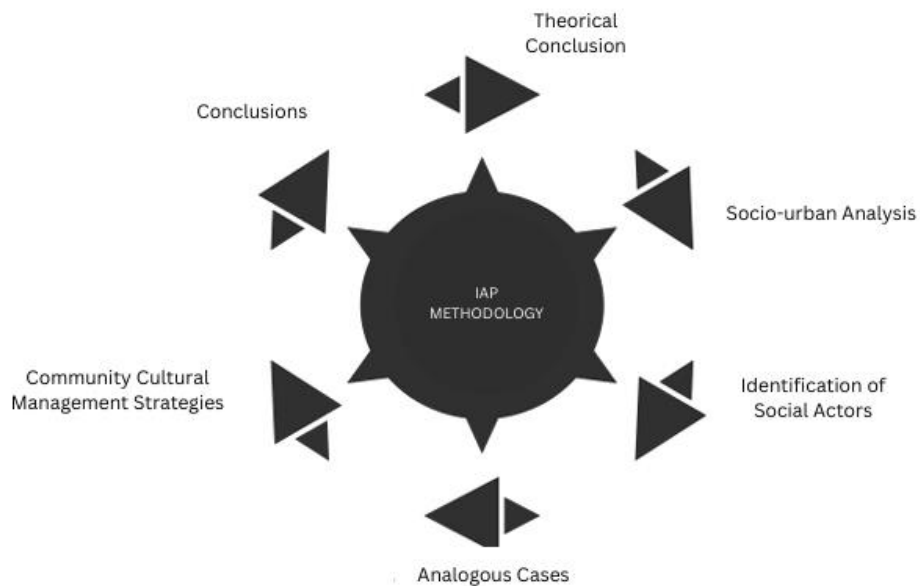
<sup>3</sup> Citing Rolando García (2008), this talks about a "snippet of reality" recognizing this undergoes transformations in its temporary development.

*Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano del Centro Histórico* (Partial Program of Urban Development of the Historical Centre) of 2021 from the *Instituto Municipal de Planeación* (Municipal Planning Institute) (IMPLAN by its acronym in Spanish, 2021). Said geostatistical analysis was complemented with qualitative information from fieldwork, through observation, and interactions with women belonging to the neighborhood of Analco and other neighborhoods, through successive approximation.

Conducting this methodology, social actors were recognized with the objective of defining the problematic focused on the experiences women face in an urban area through engaging in casual conversation. Therefore, these interactions ranged from women aged 35 to 80 years and underwent a process that started openly and spontaneously with strategies for the engagement with cultural-artistic workshops created based on proposals during the GCC process.

Working with a wide range of ages, the women involved have lived through territory changes and garnered life experiences that grant them valuable knowledge and wisdom, allowing them to build neighborly relations or create tension with other social actors. Therefore, based on data emitted from November 2022 to November 2023, maps related to the environment and cultural practices, highlighting the knowledge and wisdom owned by participating women were created.

Simultaneously, similar cases related to the recognition of women were examined, where we noticed projects in which they are recognized for their role in the preservation and teaching of the knowledge and wisdom they have, significant aspects in sustainable and urban development. Subsequently, this process led to a reflection acting as the first stage of action research; nevertheless, the journey persists as a permanent reflection that made it possible to define intervention strategies by means of a GCC, from which the limitations and tensions surrounding this process in a general way can be deduced. In Figure 1 the process of this method is illustrated.

**Figure 1.** Methodology of the IAP.

Source: Self-made, 2024.

### Theoretical Reflection

#### *The Recognition of Women in Neighborhood Life*

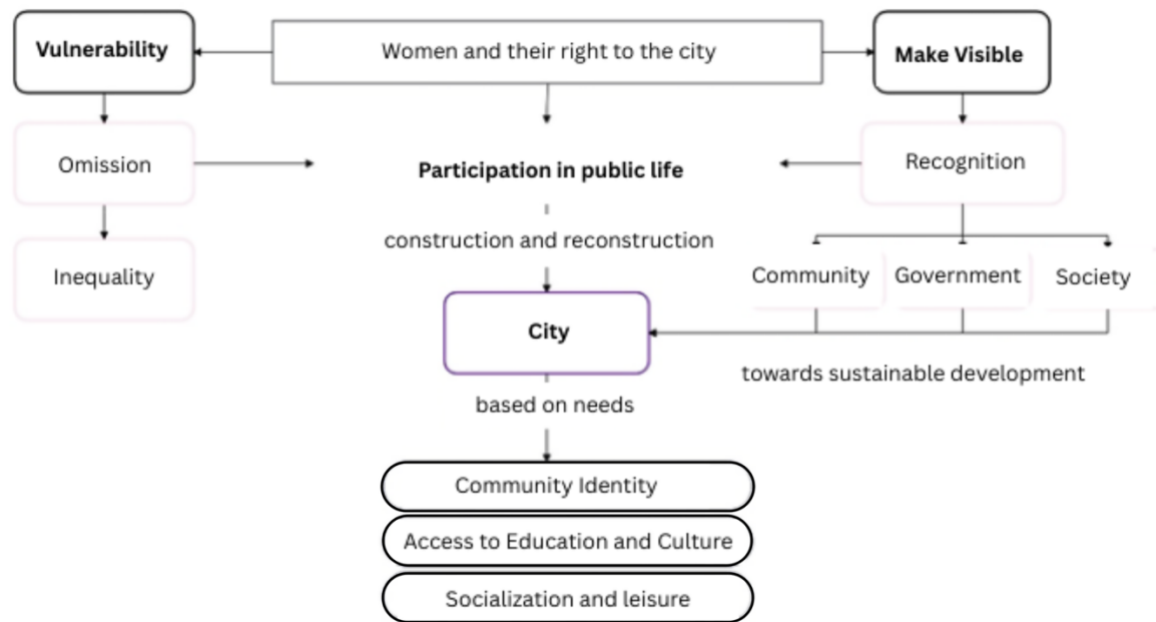
Women's studies expanded into various fields of knowledge during the second wave of feminism in the late sixties and early seventies, under the common denominator of non-androcentric scientific questions and contributions (Massolo, 1991). These studies have contributed to an understanding of the aspects that generate inequality in the household, the neighborhood, and the city (Falú, 2014). This reveals the exclusion of women that takes place in decision-making and in the construction of cities, through symbolic violence in urban development, with a lack of participation and access to services that violates their fundamental rights in educational, work-related<sup>4</sup>, and cultural spaces (Falú, 2014 in Valdivia, 2020).

<sup>4</sup>The average enrollment rates in elementary school have progressed at a constant rate; however, according to UN Women, a gender gap has brought upon the educational process a limitation, with school abandonment in secondary level, caused by pregnancy, economic resource scarcity and participating in domestic chores.

Fighting for more than half a century for equality, international organizations have promoted for the recognition of the right to the city for women and girls and have made policies to incorporate these needs in public agendas, such as, *Agenda 2030* and its 17 *Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible* (Sustainable Development Goals) (ODS for its acronym in Spanish) (Vega, 2024).

A woman's everyday life, her relationship with urban space, and experiences that come about represent a field of knowledge that must be made visible from a critical analysis of social dynamics (Flores and Monterrubio, 2016). For which, it is fundamental that it be apparent through spaces designed by and for women as a mean of empowerment, that allows them to maintain their personal and collective identity through a process of unveiling, focus and action (Plasencia, n/d). Although a gender perspective has been included in plans and programs of different governmental levels, there is still a homogenization of women; in addition, there are conscious and unconscious social conducts situated in different territorial spheres that lead to the denial of women's reality, causing inequality derived from the absence or lack of application of public policies focused on meeting their needs.

The right to the city, through participatory processes, helps to generate attention to the general and specific needs, access to cultural, economic and educational resources and healthcare; besides aspects that would contribute to socialization and the use of free time for leisure, in addition to having optimal conditions for mobility (Valdivia, 2020). Figure 2 illustrates visibility as a means of recognition for women in the city.

**Figure 2.** Visibility as a Means of Recognition for Women in Society and the Right to the City.

Source: Self-made, 2024.

### Women and Neighborhood Life in Historic Centers

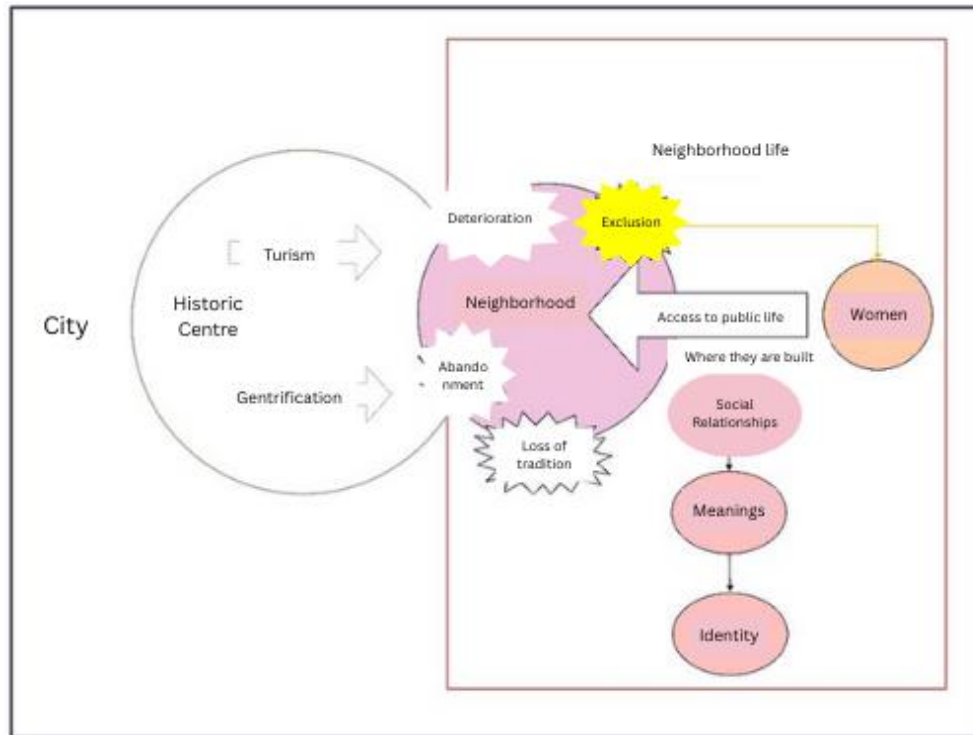
The neighborhood is the territory close to public life of women, and in the case of Analco, not only does it represent the historical and heritage value of historic centers such as Puebla, declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987. It has also caused conflict since its creation, where intervention policies of governments and property speculation have deemed it a vulnerable sector, abandoned and deteriorated; an ignored or unknown area (Hernández and De la Torre, 2011).

In the face of an accelerated privatization and land use changes have favored the economic development approach based on the provision of the services to the tourism sector as part of gentrification.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the deterioration and abandonment of households and public spaces have increased, as well as the loss of tradition, affecting living conditions and the right to a community life for women (see Figure 3). In other words,

<sup>5</sup> Understanding gentrification as a conflictive process where granting new value to deteriorated central neighborhoods arises, where the working class with low income resides, and by being involved in a process of rehabilitation, they are relinquished from their neighborhood for reasons influenced from urban management policies to be replaced with a population with a higher purchasing power, repurposing the space to offer services for consumption (Delgadillo, 2010).

there is a destabilization and fragmentation of social and local networks because of socio-cultural change and the loss of traditional individual and collective activities constituting a fragment of everyday life in native neighborhoods, essential for the identity and life of the city (Blanc, Lessard, and Negrón, 2005, in Guevara, 2019).

**Figure 3.** The Exclusion of Women in Historic Centers.



Source: Self-made.

### Community Cultural Management for the Dignification of Artistic and Cultural Knowledge in Neighborhoods

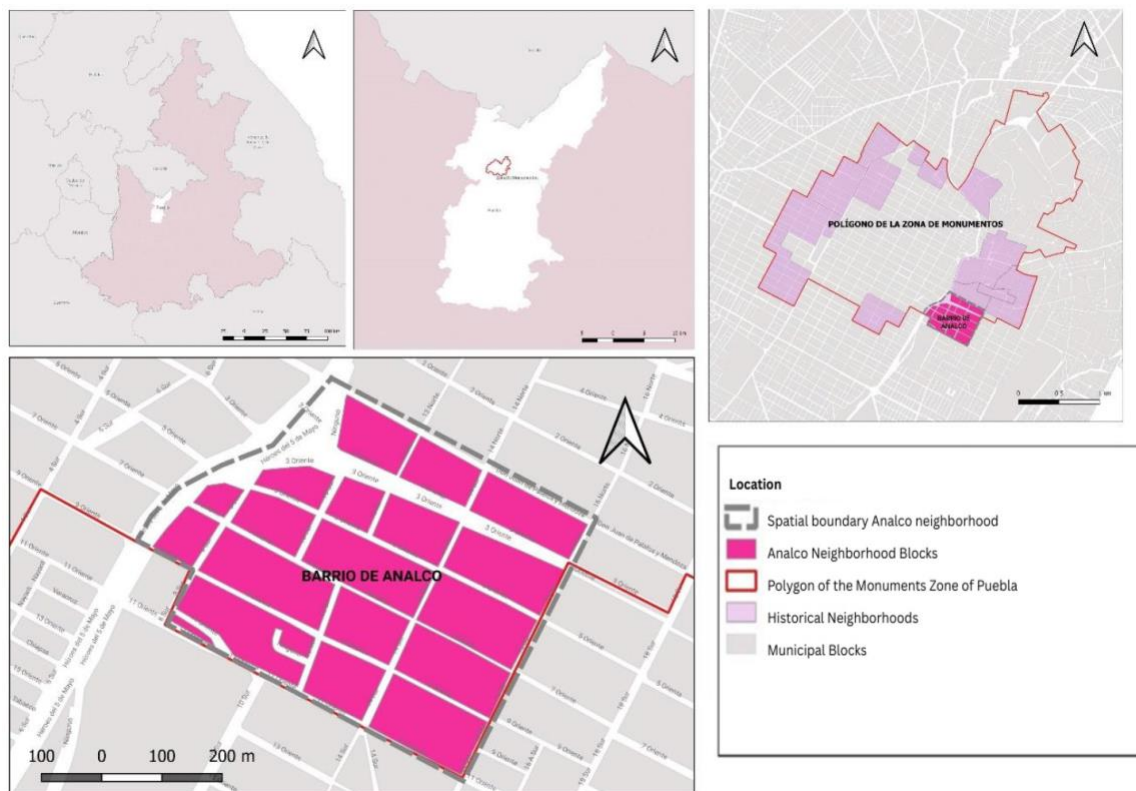
The GCC is based on the application of a series of tools and strategies involving art, cultural heritage, creativity, and education in the construction and benefit of the community. According to Guerra (2020), when this type of management is initiated within the community, this becomes a development process, which empowers those to attempt their own initiatives. Its fundamentals are horizontality, exchange, and solidarity from the community, as well as others, as Fauré and Valdés (2020) note.

Therefore, community participation is fundamental in community cultural management, allowing the needs and proposals to be identified during the process. This is achieved through the ability to establish close and communicative relationships with social actors, generating resources for creating, planning, and making a variety of cultural products, as highlighted by Fernández (2014).

## Results

The neighborhood of Analco has an area measuring 67 acres (0.2735 km<sup>2</sup>), representing 3.9% of the total of the Historic Centre of Puebla. It is bounded on the north side by *Juan de Palafox and Mendoza Avenue*, on the south by *11 Oriente*, east by *16 Sur*, and on the west by *Bulevar H. del 5 de Mayo*. It borders the neighborhood *La Luz* to the west with the historic center and to the east by *Remedios* and the *Motolinía* neighborhood (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Spatial Delimitation Map of the Analco Neighborhood.



**Source:** Self-made, based on geo-statistical mapping of urban localities and divided into blocks from INEGI 2020 and the Partial Program of Sustainable Development, 2015.

The data considered to evaluate the vulnerability of women: age of vulnerable groups such as girls and elderly women, poverty level, level of urban marginalization, and female heads of household. According to the data from the *Censo de Población y Vivienda* (Population and Housing Census), INEGI 2020, out of 1,478 residents of the neighborhood, 52.23% are women and 47.63% are men. Of the total number of women, 14.11% are girls (0-17 years old), 64.89% are adults (18-59 years old) and 20.98% are older women (59 years old and over). The feminine population has a high level of poverty, ranging from 34% to 50%, with a medium level of urban marginalization. 46% of households have a woman as head of the family.

These groups are considered to be at a disadvantage. On the one hand, girls depend on an adult economically and on the care of an adult for the development of their daily activities, on the other hand, older women depend on family economically and for health reasons, while at the same time they develop care and attention tasks for their children and grandchildren, performing various domestic activities such as cleaning, cooking, and shopping, unpaid and devalued work in the home and in society. This shows how women face obstacles keeping them in a private space, isolating them for long periods, something that was visible during the pandemic of COVID-19 in 2021. All of this is related to the manifold unpaid labor and care, which limits any opportunity of recreation and socialization, aspects salient to the physical and mental well-being of all individuals.

Pertaining to the economic and employment field, the neighborhood of Analco has shown an alteration in vocation. A few decades back, jobs such as baking, blacksmithing, tanning, and pottery, to name a few, were most common; but now it has become a vocation for the provision of services, such as education and retail trade. Women are in the majority in the latter, especially in stores selling food, administration, and customer service. These businesses are run in public spaces (gardens, sidewalks, or median strips), and semi-public spaces (commercial stores and neighborhood entrances) as well as virtual spaces like social media platforms, for example, Facebook and WhatsApp groups. These methods of self-employment depict the ways of adapting towards personal development,

specifically for women who don't have a high level of education, such as single moms and widows (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Self-employment as economic means from the women of Analco.



Source: Own image, 2022.

Addressing the educational field, according to the *Censo de Población y Vivienda* (Population and Housing Census) (INEGI, 2020), the average female level of education is 12.67, placing it around the level of high school. In a general overview, there are factors that hinder the incorporation of higher levels of education, such as the lack of economic resources, leading to temporary and poorly paid jobs or accepting an informal job. In the same manner, pregnancy and caring for a family with a partner or independently represent a challenge compelling them to unroll from school and their jobs. The demand of time for caregiving remains consistent with the unequal distribution of responsibilities in family environments. According to UN Women, there is a demand for time faced by women with small children, comparable to full-time working hours in unpaid jobs (UN Women, 2020).

## What Women Contribute to Neighborhood Life in Analco

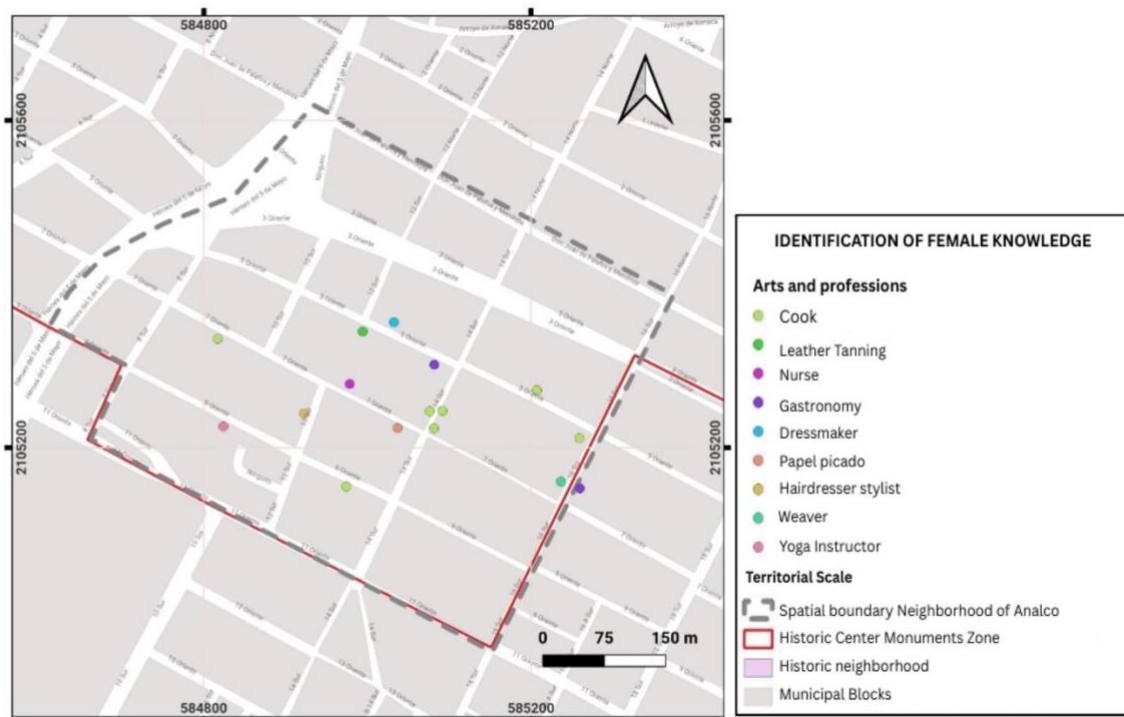
From previous data, it was essential to do further research on practices and knowledge of the women that form an intrinsic part of a personal and familial foundation. The recognition for the practices created by women is less than what they've accomplished in traditional jobs comprised of men. At the expense of women being undermined for their activities, an exploration was carried out for the cultural practices that constitute to neighborhood life, with the determinant, where do we see women participating? With various encounters with women, it was revealed that some jobs provide significance on a personal level in terms of financial benefit and experiences that generate a sense of pride and self-recognition.

Among these findings, women like Carmen show a desire to be acknowledged for their abilities, accomplishments, and social contributions beyond caring for the household. Carmen, who has worked as a hairdresser and provides services to Analco's church, expresses her satisfaction in carrying out these activities. She admits that besides her, other women possess valuable attributes and abilities:

Every woman has her story of knowledge, whether good or bad. We always talk about how our life is with our partner or children, our health, etc., that's what we share between us [...] Maybe there's more to life than suffering. We have things that keep us going, like dreams and wishful thinking, for example, cutting hair [...] I feel that I am not only a housewife, behind us there are many qualities, good or bad experiences that we live, but we are creative people, that in our time we were perhaps great dressmakers, for example, we always believe that we are purely housewives, but we are not. [...] Women need to be valued beyond what we do in the household, taking care of other people; we have dreams and aspirations that, for various circumstances, are put on hold (Carmen, 66 years of age).

What women experience in neighborhood life is vast; however, they share the need to acknowledge their abilities beyond appreciation for their household work. It's salient to recapture what was previously said in terms of GCC strategies as another phase of the research carried out from November 2022 to November 2023. Hair stylists, tanners, nurses and people with gastronomic skills in the preparation of typical regional food and pastries were identified. A dressmaker, weavers and a yoga instructor were also identified. (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Map of skills and knowledge of women.



Source: Self-made, based on fieldwork between November 2022 to November 2023.

### Communal Space as an Element for Building Neighborhood Life

This section describes the circumstances that enable women to be part of building neighborhood life, alluding to the creation of practices (including skills and knowledge) and social relationships that have significance and all sorts of socialization, despite including the aspects that marginalize it. When talking about communal spaces, this refers to meeting and coexisting places that generate relationships between people of varying characteristics (Castellano and Perez, 2003). Public, semi-public, and private places become communal spaces where women can socialize with each other (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7.** Community spaces of women in everyday life.



Source: Own image, 2024.

According to carried out fieldwork, conversations with women, and a digital survey for the latter<sup>6</sup>, we identified factors related to the perception of public spaces by the female population. These findings revealed there are distinct ways to perceive a space, ranging from positive to negative, strongly related to the physical characteristics of each space, in addition to the designated purpose of these places that organized, and government groups have determined.

Public spaces such as *Jardines 1* and *2* of Analco, located beside *Bulevard 5 de Mayo* and the historic center of the city, welcome tourists who visit flea markets for handcrafted goods and the gastronomic corridor on weekends. Both parks enjoy the optimal conditions that promote their use and sense of security. As compared to other places, such as the *Jerusalem Park* within the neighborhood, located between *9 Oriente* and *12 Sur* streets, it has undergone a severe decline in maintenance of green areas and urban amenities. These factors impact its perception, deeming it unsafe, and for that matter, academic groups formed by teachers and students of the School of Architecture have tried to influence by promoting the architectural heritage value of this and other public spaces in Analco.

<sup>6</sup> This survey was conducted through Instagram in order to know the perception of the perception of the neighborhood of Analco by women who do not live there, with a total of 27 participants. In this exercise, three types of answers were considered: good, bad and never having visited Analco; in addition, they were asked in a specific way for the reason for their answer. The survey was active for 24 hours, appearing in the section of stories on the social platform.

The neglect of neighbors and authorities of public spaces has led to its misuse by groups or outsiders participating in illegal activities harmful to their well-being. The aforementioned belongs to a part of the perception of insecurity that residents and visitors have, which decelerates the processes of appropriation, appreciation, and knowledge of the space (see Figure 8).

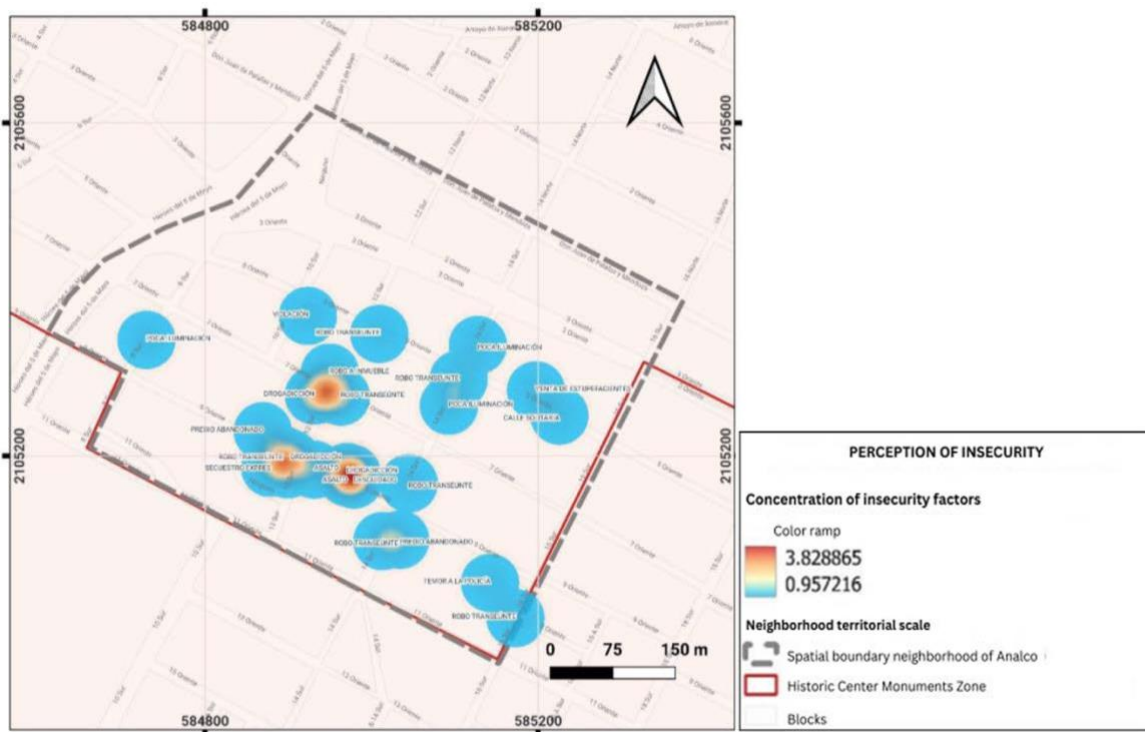
**Figure 8.** Physical conditions associated with a perception of insecurity in Parque Jerusalem.



Source: Own image, 2024.

In between fieldwork and conversations with the feminine population from November 2022 to November 2023, a map of places deemed unsafe by women living directly or indirectly in the neighborhood was created. As you can see in Figure 9, the main points where the majority of risk factors exist are those of street robbery, drug dealing, a lack of lighting, abandoned places, sexual violence, and express kidnapping.

**Figure 9.** Map of where it is perceived unsafe by the feminine population.



Source: Self-made, based on fieldwork carried out from November 2022 to November 2023.

According to conversations with the feminine population, their childhoods were significantly impacted by the use of communal spaces. They remember nostalgically their social life with friends and neighbors but have lost those experiences caused by changes in land use, the use of electronic devices in new generations, and the arrival of new residents, who cause distrust. Furthermore, the police have denied the use of streets for recreational activities, and delinquent groups dedicated to illicit drug trade known as “*la mafia*” have terrorized and instilled fear in the population. However, there persists a yearning to recover those spaces, which hold a meaningful part in their life:

I like being able to remember my childhood, I felt free back then; nothing ever happened to us, even at 12 at night [...] We would make balls of yarn. We used to play baseball, and spinning tops, but now you don't see anyone doing that anymore. Kids play on their phones...yet, in my childhood. Girls played in the streets [...] Since a few years ago, police started to take anyone playing in the streets; that changed everything (Judith, 62 years of age).

Another discovery was 7 *Oriente* Street as a point of reunion and cultural identity, where cultural and religious activities take place, for example, the *Huehues* Carnival and Way of the Cross in Holy Week. In addition, the church of *Santo Ángel Custodio*<sup>7</sup>, a semi-public space where the community gathers for cultural and religious practices (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10.** Women participating in cultural practices of the neighborhood.



Source: Own image, 2024.

The neighborhood's identity is associated with the households' yards, enriched with memory, rootedness, recognition, and a sense of belonging for women. These spaces don't only hold memories, but they also create new experiences and relationships between family, neighbors, and friends. Women play a crucial role in developing that identity, since it involves subjective factors such as beliefs, thoughts, awareness, preferences, and judgment about everyday life (see Figure 11).

<sup>7</sup>The church of *Santo Ángel Custodio* in Analco is one of the oldest, built in 1627.

**Figure 11.** Patios as the identity of women in Analco.



Source: Own image, 2024.

### **Community Planning to Solve Problems in the Neighborhood**

From conversing with women from the neighborhood, variables related to participation and organization were found. The neighborhood of Analco does not have a committee that attends to essential necessities, caused by distrust among neighbors and towards governmental and academic institutions. To this day, women consider themselves excluded as a population from participating in projects the government and academic institutions have established, since they do not know or do not identify the objectives set forth, which overuse the historical heritage of the neighborhood for personal interest.

Government institutions have carried out intervention projects improving household facades and empty lots, the actual and previous governments and civil organizations maintaining this as a constant practice; however, a neglect of social aspects women and their families show concern for, such as drug addiction, prostitution, and insecurity, has been apparent.

As previously stated, a lack of participation from women is a repeated pattern present in the neighborhood and other such places because of a perception of insecurity and the absence of neighborhood organization, as well as the precariousness of time,

where women spend most of their time to domestic chores, whereas their free time is spent with family members or friends. Nevertheless, isolation in a private space, caused by fear, creates an obstacle for integration into recreational spaces, thus fostering mistrust among neighbors.

Despite these aspects, there are women searching for a way to contribute to events pertaining to their neighborhood, like Isabel, who for more than 20 years has supported her neighbors financially and in matters of health and economy, managing resources of employment. However, it has not been an easy task, having to overcome obstacles that have limited her from improving the neighborhood. Isabel considers that governmental authorities have not been flexible in their requests for support, and she considers that they are incongruent between their speeches and the actions they take, in the sense that they are only being heard in time for electoral campaigns, this representing an important element for political actors.

If people would think about supporting with the little they can, we'd be in a better situation...besides, the government doesn't help us, they abstain from giving us resources [...] Authorities have come to run for municipal president and I've told them to live the neighborhood life, walk through it at night, to see for themselves the needs that exist (Isabel, 65 years of age).

This shows the requirement for an answer to other problems of organizational matters instead of resources: tools for neighbors and authorities to observe and solve everyday issues are required. Unfortunately, Ana Isabel has come to realize the search and obtainment of resources weakens community organization.

It is the paternalistic role civil and public organizations adopt, looking to cover basic needs by granting in-kind or monetary incentives through actions that put the population in competition which generates controversy and disputes among neighbors. These types of interventions are considered by the government and academic institutions as a means of bonding with the population; however, as Isabel explains, these actions diminish participation among neighbors, because they get used to receiving support and place the responsibility on the government to improve their living conditions.

This situation is related to the fact that public institutions, such as the Management of the Historic Centre of Puebla and Cultural Heritage, in connection with other institutions, persist in distancing themselves from the neighborhood's population. While conducting the research, it was observed that actions carried out were limited to teaching and promoting educational activities of architectural heritage, with the objective of spreading awareness for the conditions of space, and not for the benefit of the local population.

Moreover, regarding the Historic Centre Management Plan, strategies concerning the promotion of participation from a gender perspective are needed, where women are considered as part of the population within neighborhoods, thus generating a richness based on identities, which concentrate characteristic features that should be considered in participatory processes for the creation of public policies. Participation is essential to encourage communication and joint responsibility among the different social actors, in order to take action over existing issues.

Currently, a Neighborhood Committee for Native Neighborhoods exists, that promotes the historical value of the neighborhoods of Xanenetla, Analco, *la Luz y el Alto* via interventions in public spaces and cultural events that unite diverse corporate and academic communities. These actions that are finally developed tend to improve the physical aspect of household facades and promote cultural activities aimed at mass gatherings to promote the touristification of the neighborhood. However, even with strategies propose to contribute to the revaluation of the historical heritage, promoting cultural activities, it is necessary to promote the inclusion and participation of women, aimed at undertaking actions from the revaluation of know-how and knowledge, as the main tools involved to contribute to the strengthening of the community fabric that has been getting weakened by variables already mentioned.

### **Identification and Affiliation with Social Actors**

The identification and affiliation with the implicated social actors were carried out through two key phases of the research: the first being my involvement as an observer and active

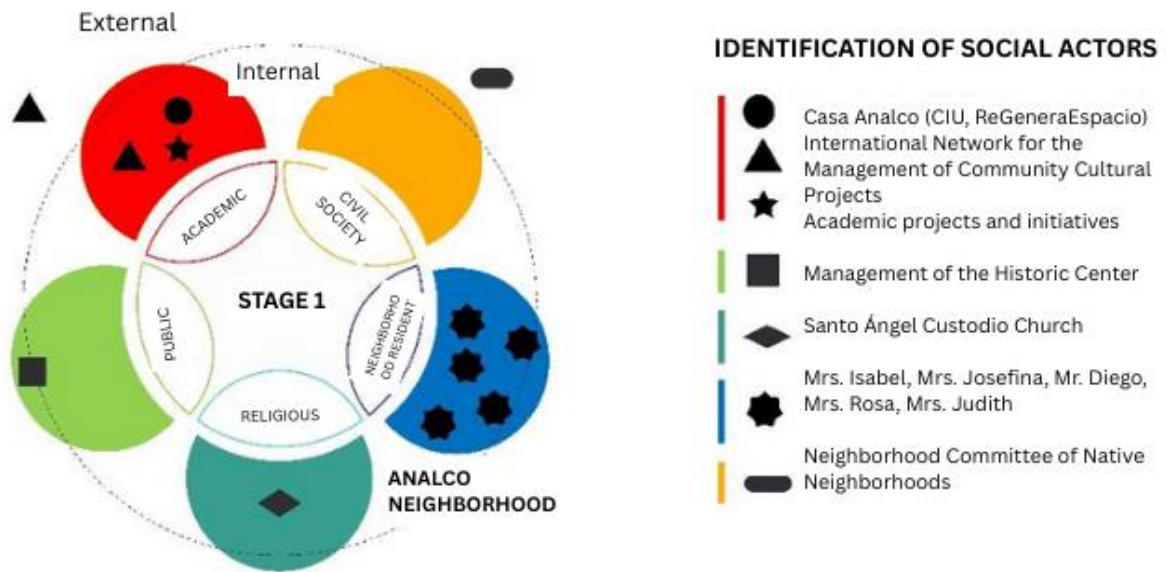
participant in the project *Casa Analco*<sup>8</sup> in the mentioned neighborhood. Starting from 2018, the first encounters with the territory took place, and a connection with the project to learn about the objectives and actions implemented was established, as well as to identify the main social actors with a significant role, impacting the neighborhood positively or negatively. This first encounter with the social actors was possible through the organization of cultural activities, field visits, and academic forums.

In an academic environment, the social actors identified were *Casa Analco*, in addition to the connection and joint work with other researchers. In a civil society, an encounter with the Native Neighborhoods Committee was carried out. From the residents of the neighborhood, the social actors identified were women like Isabel, Josefina, Rosa, Judith, and the community doctor, Diego. In a religious environment, an encounter with the Church of *Santo Ángel Custodio* took place when attending cultural and religious festivities in order to recognize the participation of women in these practices. Furthermore, in the public sector, the manager of the Historic Centre of Puebla was able to be identified although there was no direct approach and carrying out a follow-up on actions taken during the research (2021-2024) (see Figure 12).

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<sup>8</sup> University project of the School of Architecture in the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, which involved professors, students and postgraduates in the area of Architecture, Urbanism and Design, with Dr. Adriana Hernandez as supervisor, who is the director of the civil association Re Genera Espacio and Dr. Norma Leticia Ramirez, head of the *Centro de Investigación y Gestión Urbana* (Center of Research and Urban Development) (CIU by its acronym in Spanish).

Figure 12. Participating Social Actors within the research (Stage 1).

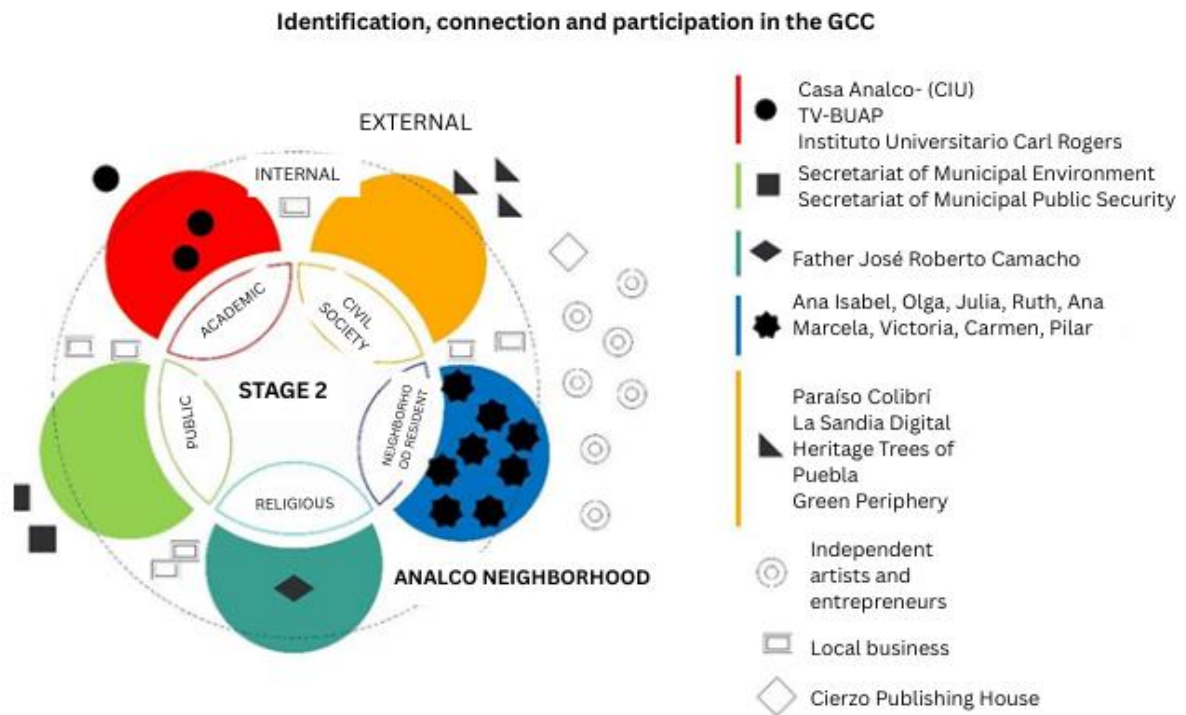


Source: Self-made, 2024.

The second phase consisted of a GCC process to establish strategic actions associating the needs found among the encounters with women of the neighborhood. Within this phase, my role became that of cultural manager through the proposal of the *Mujeres Construyendo Barrio* initiative, where decision-making by proposing joint actions with other social actors was implicated, to transform part of the reality based on predefined problems through previous fieldwork.

The encounter was carried out based on proposals of social subjects from the neighborhoods; through these activities, connections with other social actors not directly belonging to the neighborhood of Analco were possible. This benefitted the exchange of experiences, learning and new knowledge that strengthened the social fabric of the neighborhood. Figure 13 illustrates the internal and external actors that participated in the second phase.

Figure 13. Participating Social Actors in Phase 2.



Source: Self-made, 2024.

### Analogous Cases

A review of successful cases was carried out, beginning on a national and international scale, with the objective of showing the participation of women in their contribution to the sharing of knowledge and know-how in a varied territorial context. On a national scale, yet influential both nationally and internationally, the *Centro de Artes Indígenas* (Center of Indigenous Arts) (CAI by its acronym in Spanish)<sup>9</sup> was identified, which is an intercultural and educational institution with an artistic focus, of great significance for the region of *Totonacapan* in Veracruz. There, *Totonac* women play a prominent role in the sharing of knowledge and traditions. Over time, their roles have become more active in education, culture, society and politics. The CAI provides a space for Totonac women to share their knowledge and be acknowledged as the bearers of intangible culture, representing the living heritage of their region. This ensures dialogue and reflection about inclusion and

<sup>9</sup> In 2012 it was named as Intangible Cultural Heritage in the category of Good Practices by UNESCO (UNESCO 2016).

gender equality, respecting and valuing the abilities of every person. For instance, women occupy important spaces in CAI by participating in traditional council for decision-making, as well as teaching about their own art and ancestral knowledge to younger generations, bestowing value upon them as bearers and sharers of the living heritage, which contributing to sustainable development and the conservation of Totonac culture. But it has also allowed women to acknowledge themselves beyond their assigned roles in a domestic sphere, benefitting on a personal and community level (Figure 14).

**Figure 14.** Women's participation in the CAI's decision-making process.



Source: Centro de Artes Indígenas, 2023.

Preceding this, at an international scale, three successful cases were identified, the first being in Barichara, Colombia, where women have accomplished personal and collective benefits through teaching-learning spaces in a process of creativity development. Similarly, there's the "Taller Fibra de Papel" of the *Fundación San Lorenzo*, where artists, such as Juan Manuel de la Rosa promote the participation of women in

charge of the household through teaching artisanal techniques, such as making paper with natural fique fibers and dyes. Over time, groups of artisans have become what is known today as the living heritage of their community, providing tools for continued progress and innovation. Through cultural practices, the community of women in Barichara have been able to obtain and maintain benefits in the work environment, being a significant aspect for the latter responsible for or supporting the financial aspect of the household. With other projects such as *Fundación Escuela Taller*, *Casa Común*, *Formas de Luz*, knowledge pertaining to jobs represent a part of the living heritage that contributes to preserving the local wealth that women hold. In this sense, women are acknowledged for the experience, establishing a connection between women of the region, national and international artists in a constant learning process for knowledge (see Figure 15).

**Figure 15.** Women from the Santander Region in Colombia contributing to their communities.



Source: Own image, 2023.

The second successful case is the *Arte Corte* project, located in the neighborhood *Santo Ángel* in the Historic Center of Havana, established in 1999<sup>10</sup> as a space to dignify jobs such as hairdressing and to rescue the memory and identity of people. Through social

<sup>10</sup> Initiative taken by citizen and hairdresser of the neighborhood, Gilberto Valladares.

participation, sustainability and community development have been achieved, by centering the living heritage represented by the people, with culture as the focus for progress. It has been carried out an ongoing awareness-raising effort among neighborhood residents to conserve, restore, and value their cultural heritage as an integral part of their environment. This has required the participation of different social actors, including the Office of the Historian by means of the Master Plan and local entrepreneurs. As a result, social, economic, and cultural benefits for the community have been possible through initiatives promoting social participation without gender or age discrimination. Simultaneously, integrating varied territorial aspects and diverse social groups, including men, women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

The produced initiatives promote equality between men and women, which allows their participation in diverse roles; some women, now, represent initiatives that established a significant connection with the population, facing continuous obstacles (Figure 16).

**Figure 16.** Women participating in Hairdressing.



Source: Arte Corte, 2019.

It is worth noting that the project has had a positive impact on entrepreneurs by engaging with knowledge in a professional setting. It emphasizes the role of women, despite the obstacles related to cultural patterns, assuming a new role of personal integrity heightened by interaction and learning in an educational process and social innovation. From an approach of solidarity economy, teachers offer their services to the community to learn a wide range of skills in arts and professions. This has contributed to the sense that the new generations reevaluate cultural practices associated with professions, in addition to being included in each process, considering the interests of vulnerable groups through community assemblies.

The final successful case is the *Proyecto Habitar* in Buenos Aires, Argentina. They advocate processes of participation and conversation between social actors, through initiatives such as *Promotoras de Habitat Saludable*, to improve the living conditions of neighborhoods, promoting healthy development of urban activities. Moreover, it provides women a space to share their experiences and needs through “*voces de la vida cotidiana*,” with the objective of creating with the help of diverse social actors, solutions to identified issues aimed at space distribution, economy, quality of basic services, infrastructure, and communication costs. This initiative makes women visible, creating spaces for demonstration, participating in the construction of their environment (Figure 17).

Figure 17. *Voces de la vida cotidiana* in the *Proyecto Habitar* initiative.



Voces de la vida cotidiana...

**“Como no tenemos espacio,  
muchas veces se trabaja por la noche,  
interrumpiendo constantemente la tarea,  
en lugares incómodos, con poca luz o frios.”**

La cantidad y la distribución del espacio en la vivienda impactan en el desarrollo de nuestras actividades diarias.

Un hábitat saludable comprende espacios suficientes, y agradables. Esto es importante porque es donde cotidianamente construimos formas de relacionarnos.

**PROMOTORAS DE HÁBITAT SALUDABLE**

 **PROYECTO  
HABITAR**



Source: <http://www.proyectohabitar.org/>

As shown in Table 1, the previously mentioned projects have objectives consistent with the promotion of the participation and local development of their communities, based on the territorial, urban, or rural context. In these projects, there exists a management based on the connection with diverse social actors strengthening help resources. These actors belonging to the public and private sector, civil organizations, artists, citizens, etc., contribute progressively to the conditions and necessities being presented. Benefits are revealed that contribute to the development of communities, whether cultural, social, economic, or environmental.

**Table 1.** Analogous cases with national and international success.

Scale	Name	Place	Objective	Social Actors	Benefits
National	<b>Centro de Artes Indígenas (Center of Indigenous Arts)</b>	Papantla, Veracruz	Converse, reflect, research, and recognize the skills and knowledge of women	Private Sector Public Sector Citizens Academy	Cultural Socio-economic Environmental
	<b>Proyectos artes y oficios (Project art and professions)</b>	Barichara, Colombia	Promote the cultural and natural richness, underlining the value of artisan women as living heritage.	Private Sector Public Sector Citizens Artists, artisans	Cultural Socio-economic Environmental
International	<b>Proyecto Habitar (Project Habitar)</b>	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Develop plans, programs, projects, architectural and urban policies for the right to housing and the city from a gender perspective.	Private Sector Public Sector Citizens Academy	Social Urban Environmental
	<b>Proyecto Arte Corte (Project Arte Corte)</b>	Havana, Cuba	Integral local development of the cultural intangible or living heritage, arts and professions being the focus to implement through sensitization of women and men residing the neighborhood of <i>Santo Ángel</i> with the purpose of restoring, conserve and valuing the cultural patrimony.	Private Sector Public Sector Citizens Academy	Cultural Socio-economic Environmental

Source: Self-made, 2024.

Overall, these analogous cases demonstrate the acknowledgement of women for their right to the city, promoting participation and democracy jointly with social actors, who served as connectors that contributed to defining strategies to encourage sustainable development.

### Strategies Promoting the Participation of Women from Analco

Continuing what was previously stated, a new phase of IAP was carried out through a new process in GCC acting as the primary strategy to promote the participation of women in their acknowledgement of capabilities by means of contributing to the right to the city.

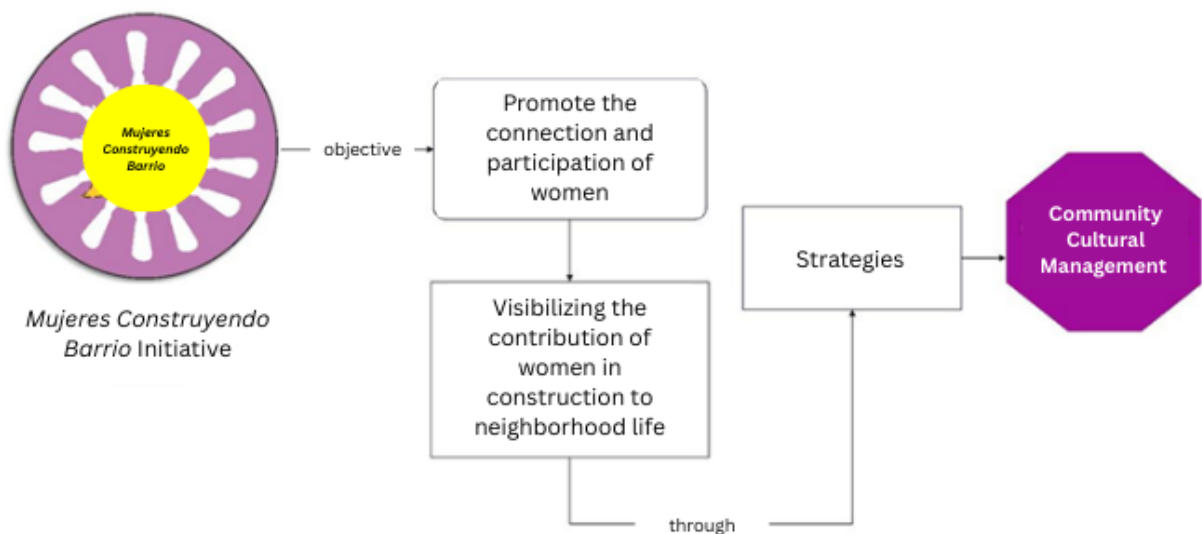
Decision-making through citizen participation is an essential aspect to ensure the right to the city. GCC is a process that promotes participation, as well as the visibility of

marginalized groups, identifying specific and general problems and needs with the purpose of developing strategies and creating possible solutions in collaborative processes in the community itself (Sánchez, 2014).

These strategies can contribute to the production of cultural policies starting from the community, to promote participation in the right to the city, not only for women, but also for children, adolescents, and the elderly, where topics from the *Agenda 21* of cultural rights are addressed.

From the information previously mentioned, in September of 2022, the initiative of *Mujeres Construyendo Barrio* was created, which represents the second phase of the IAP that was based on a GCC that contributed to establishing communication with women from the neighborhood and other such social actors, with the resolution of implementing values towards solidarity and sharing with a support network, aside from making the contribution of women in building neighborhood life visible (Figure 18).

**Figure 18.** *Mujeres Construyendo Barrio* initiative promoting the participation of women from Analco.



Source: Self-made, 2024.

For this article, the strategies will not be addressed in detail, however, they will be shown as a summary of the actions implemented carried out during October 2022 to April 2024. Table 2 shows the respective classification for each strategy, as well as its objective.

**Table 2.** Classification of strategies and activities carried out.

No.	Classification	Objective	Activities
1	<b>Community Art and Profession</b>	Exchange and recognize knowledge based on art and professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Binding Workshop</li> <li>● Photography Workshop</li> <li>● Costume Jewelry Workshop</li> <li>● Flower Making with Pipe Cleaners Workshop</li> </ul>
2	<b>Heritage Culture</b>	Identify traditional or inherited knowledge to promote generational heritage and its preservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "Interweaved" Knitting Workshops.</li> <li>● <i>Piñata</i> Making Workshop</li> <li>● <i>Cartonería</i> Mask Making Workshop</li> </ul>
3	<b>Ecological Creative Culture</b>	Promote awareness and care for the environment through beneficial practices incorporating creativity from artistic abilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pot Making with Reused Materials Workshop</li> <li>● Christmas Candlesticks Workshop</li> <li>● Creative Community Workshops "Día de Muertos" (Day of the Death)</li> <li>● "Creating a Pollinator Garden" Workshop</li> <li>● Jerusalem Park Planting Day</li> <li>● "Taking Care of my Park" Day</li> <li>● Garden Art with stones</li> </ul>
4	<b>Literary Feeling-Thinking</b>	Express thoughts and feelings with the help of writing and literature to interpret our personal and collective reality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Writing Workshop for women "Narrating our Feeling-thinking"</li> <li>● Creative Reading Workshop</li> <li>● Analco 2023 Writings Days</li> </ul>
5	<b>Culture of the Body</b>	To promote the care of the body territory in a holistic way, physical activation and healthy eating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Yoga Classes</li> <li>● Healthy Cooking Classes</li> <li>● Low Impact Body Toning Classes</li> <li>● First Aid Workshop</li> </ul>
6	<b>Sensitization through Films</b>	Sensitization through films to encourage reflection in sociocultural and environmental topics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Film Series "Territorios, resistencias y alternativas"</li> </ul>

Source: Self-made, 2024.

In a new phase of this research, strategic actions were developed in collaboration with other social actors, with successive approximations through the creation of public, semi-public and private spaces. Underlining the use of spaces women deemed as unsafe.

In this situation, there was an attempt to address some elements that cause the deterioration of the social fabric. Additionally, the great majority of those actions served as a channel for women to express their emotions, a significant contribution in facing the repercussions of losing loved ones at the hands of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Conclusion

The IAP made it possible to highlight the relevance women have in neighborhood life; the procedures carried out contributed to the following aspects:

The theoretical reflection contributed to delving into concepts associated with women's studies, their importance, and their contribution to the development of communities. To reinforce the theoretical discourse, through the analogous cases and the importance of including women in projects for community development was observed.

Furthermore, the exploratory field trips allowed the identification of leading spaces that are most frequented in their everyday lives, as well as community spaces where cultural practices take place. Likewise, the testimonies given contributed to give a voice to the women, such as their desires, memories of their daily lives, and their interest in being recognized for their abilities.

The maps served as identifiers of public spaces perceived as unsafe. In addition, through the encounters and conversations with participating social actors, a first map of contemporary arts and professions was illustrated. This contributes to the visibility of women in the space as a means of analysis of everyday problems, offering a prospect for establishing short and long-term strategic actions.

Identifying actors acted as a tool that was constantly implemented; however, for the first phase of the research, the direct incidence of internal and external actors for the analysis and comprehension of existing issues lies the flexibility of this methodology, which enables a continuous back and forth to identify new social actors. In that sense, based on the model carried out for this research, it was crucial that women from the neighborhood participated this way, they were able to not only broach problems within their neighborhood but also internal aspects that affect or motivate them.

In general, women from the neighborhood of Analco outline various conditions that limit their presence in neighborhood life, private life being one of their primary limitations, derived from the workload they do daily. However, it is important to emphasize that women represent more than solely a vulnerable group, counting on the necessary abilities to tackle daily challenges, which prioritizes their integration in decision-making promoting their participation horizontally.

Facing the circumstances they experience in the neighborhood, either internally or externally, the development of strategies from a community culture perspective will promote, besides participation, the recognition of the right to the city. Therefore, GCC strategies incite socio-cultural activities of women of all ages, with the intention of identifying and establishing a connection between other social actors to acknowledge the knowledge and practices of women. This requires exploration and management with the objective of providing spaces where they can express and preserve their acquired knowledge, therefore obtaining personal and collective well-being.

During the process, tensions and obstacles arose, firstly, related to the precarity of time women have to participate in activities pertaining to their neighborhood; secondly, personal conflicts between participating women related to the way of informing and discrediting the practices carried out; however, being open to finding a solution to involved differences was not enough for some women to keep being participants.

To conclude, getting to know the neighborhood, we become aware of its heterogeneity, and the relevance of preserving participation processes to establish public policies focused on people, specifically women.

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