



# Urban revitalisation with music and dance in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico

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## Abstract

The paper portrays the *Plazuela de la Campana*, a historical small square in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico that fell into ill-use and was revived with a strategy of music and dance events. The case demonstrates how music and dance became a new tradition that nurtures a collective attachment to the Plazuela and contributes to it being regarded as heritage. The privately initiated revitalisation borrows potency from prior nostalgic memories and traditions to overpower the past notoriety of the square. Dance and music, besides creating pleasant associations, effectively build a network of friendships that engages people in the square and through which the history of the place becomes remembered. All these effects deepen the meaningfulness of the Plazuela, which fosters personal affection towards the square and ultimately, it is proposed, translates into a general appreciation—a lesson to be learned for emerging urban planning practices.

**Keywords** Plazuela de la Campana · Public space · Tactical urbanism · Music and dance · Urban revitalisation · Veracruz

## Introduction

In balmy weekend nights in the Port of Veracruz,<sup>1</sup> a few hundred visitors crowd into the *Plazuela de la Campana* (the *Plazuela*, which could be referred to as ‘Bell’s Small Square’), a square tucked away from the main plaza (*Zócalo*) in the historic centre of Veracruz, Mexico. Visitors come to listen and dance with Cuban-based genres, like *son montuno* and *danzón*. For a casual passer-by, the happening appears as a burst of authentic street life and decayed colonial buildings intensify the sentimental lyrics of the music. Yet establishing these concerts in the square that was three decades ago notorious for filth and misdemeanour is a result of a persistent endeavour. The study of the Plazuela sets out to understand how the square that fell into ill-use, partly because of its spatial properties, revived and new perceptions arose to cover up its past notoriety and how existing traditions and cultural

meanings were borrowed for the success of the project. The focus of the paper is on how people create emotional attachments to a place and the way it contributes to the place considered as heritage.

Cities are understood increasingly as complex adaptive systems. There is a growing interest in making use of self-organising social processes and informality in city planning. Conventionally, urban planning aims to fix a result permanently, but there is an emerging recognition of open-ended ‘alternative planning’ that encompasses flexible, tactical, collaborative, and community-based strategies (Bishop and Williams 2012, pp. 179–211). Here, understanding traditions and memories can be valuable both for the progress of theory of urbanism as well as for emerging practices such as ‘tactical urbanism’ that use exploratory and iterative methods to pave way for regeneration (Carmona et al. 2003; Butina Watson and Bentley 2007; Lydon and Garcia 2015).

Recent recognition of tactical urban practices has increased in the urban literature in different geographies, particularly in debates on public spaces (Gehl 2001; Carmona et al. 2003; Butina Watson and Bentley 2007; Boano and Talocci 2014; Lydon and Garcia 2015; Madanipour 2019). As in other urban regeneration debates around the

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<sup>1</sup> Port of Veracruz is henceforth called Veracruz. It should be noted that the Port of Veracruz (municipality) is located in the State of Veracruz, Mexico.



world, folklore and cultural activities have been deployed to change the image of decayed urban areas (Low and Smith 2006; Porter and Shaw 2009; Bishop and Williams 2012; Hall 2012; De La Llata 2016). This discussion has also included Latin American context, which has been affected by particular features of urbanisation and negotiations between formality and informality and social displacement in urban areas and public spaces (Ward 1993; Jones and Varley 1994, 1999; Low 2000; Donovan 2008; Irazábal 2008). Some of these debates have questioned what lessons can be learnt from bottom-up strategies and tactical principles in cities and public spaces (Galvis 2014; De La Llata 2016; Gutiérrez H. 2017).

The study of the Plazuela de la Campana is intended to analyse how social practices and quotidian urban life become personal and collective memories. The research seeks to understand whether memories and attachment towards the Plazuela have contributed to its process of revitalisation. The study expands the discourse on memories and heritage by investigating how people create an emotional attachment towards historic places and how affections can both sustain the character of a place and initiate a revitalisation of public space. It analyses how new traditions may influence collective memory and foster attachment to a place, maintaining a process of revitalisation.

In the study of the Plazuela, we found how music and dance helped to create stronger social bonds, which eventually became memories of the square and a sort of attachment towards it developed. We recorded how quotidian activities in the Plazuela are distributed across (spatialised) the square, analysing how its urban layout instigates certain practices and establishes cyclical urban rhythms from weekdays to weekends and whether these rhythms contribute to how the square is remembered. In the case of the Plazuela, music and dance activities nurture sociability; this eventually became memories and way of feeling attached towards the square. These forms of attachment may develop a much powerful strategy to revitalise public spaces than any urban policy or a conventional top-down approach in urban planning.

## The construction of place attachment and memories

Understanding place attachment compels to investigate the formation of memories. The mind contemplates the present from the past (Bergson 1988); attachment assumes re-invoking fond images or actions related to the place. A contiguous succession of experiences does not hold together memories (Hintzman 2016). Instead, Maurice Halbwachs established the notion of collective memory, associating with the totality of thoughts that hold together memories, which are anchored to social milieu (Halbwachs

1992). It reminds individuals of certain things in their past and of history at large: people share thoughts and memories; some places are laden in various ways with reminders of yesterday (Halbwachs 1980). Remembering is therefore fundamentally collective. Furthermore, memories have also a material dimension (Bachelard 1994). In public spaces, people may remember activities as well as the spatial characteristics of a place; for instance, the alley where they walked, the bench where they first kissed, or even some aspects closely associated with the material qualities of a place, such as shadows and/or colours of the urban landscapes (Gutiérrez H. 2016). Consequently, understanding place attachment, particularly as a collective phenomenon entails investigating how places and social networks carry particular memories.

The urban fabric is not a neutral repository of memory. The spatial structure of cities keeps people and things together and apart in various ways, creating probabilities of encountering that unfold in movement in space (Hillier 2007). These social intensifications affect memories as mental images per se, but also by bringing certain spatial information to collective attention. Repetition and frequency improve memory (Hintzman 2010). Accordingly, the spatial structure reminds of things in space and associates them to one another selectively, livelier places having a higher capacity of being-in-memory by nature and unfrequented places facing collective oblivion. Social intensifications that urban fabric creates are a precondition for local history to exist: the quotidian liveliness of a street is expected to continue to the future and have existed in the past, thus becoming imprinted in memory (Griffiths 2015). As ‘space is social morphology’, it is as well-collective framework for memory (Lefebvre 1991, p. 151).

Social milieu does not define individual memories, but individual memory is ‘a point of view on the collective memory’ (Halbwachs 1980, pp. 94–95). The past is not only accumulations of historical memories, but memories are interpreted—selected, re-associated—with the needs of the present, skewing the collective memory and reciprocally the individual narratives build on it. The past is, to a degree, socially constructed (Halbwachs 1992). On that account, collective memory can be like a playground of memories (Boym 2001). Tradition—indistinguishable from collective memory—is an example of a notion that can be easily toyed with because of its multivalence. While repetition already implies a tradition, typically it refers to the construction of memories and permanence over several generations. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger defined ‘invented tradition’ to describe practices that pursue to appear old although they are recent (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, pp. 1–14). Invented traditions build on ‘tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature’ and they are prominent in the creation of national identity, for example; typically new traditions aim



to implant ‘certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, p. 1).

Cities and nations are built around imagined and remembered communities, which are grounded in common traditions, stories, and the shared experience of life (Tuan 1974). The use of culture and folklore is a powerful mechanism to implement new traditions that influence people’s environmental perceptions (Tuan 1974, p. 246). Old traditions can readily graft on new ones, or be devised by borrowing from old symbolisms. The past and historical social practices can inspire strategies to create new traditions that attribute their borrowed meanings to places (Gustafson 2001) and in that way foster personal affections and attachments to nations, community uses, and social engagement.

## Methods of research

To investigate traditions and memories in the process of revitalisation of the Plazuela de la Campana, we combined different methods of research: ethnography, participant observations, systematic observations of people recorded on maps, archival research, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires on-site and in Facebook open groups, and an analysis of the urban form.

The study of the Plazuela was carried out in two stages. First, we employed ethnographic research during different periods from 2016 to 2017. Moreover, one of the authors have experienced the process of revitalisation in the Plazuela as a regular visitor since the early 2000s. We interviewed key actors in the process of revitalisation<sup>2</sup> and studied historical notes, analysing newspaper clippings and historic photographs from the archives of Miguel Ángel García Cortés (Don Miguel), owner of *Café Auténtico Veracruzano* (the Authentic Cafe of Veracruz) by the Plazuela, and the initiator of the music and dance events. We observed and recorded visitors’ activities, movement, and occupation patterns in the square and compared them with an analysis of the form of the Plazuela, based on a computational visibility graph analysis (Gutiérrez H. and Törmä 2017; Törmä and Gutiérrez H. 2020). Part of these results was presented in a public exhibition named ‘Infra-ordinario’ in Casa Principal Gallery in Veracruz from September to October 2016. During the exhibition, we asked visitors to write on sticky notes their memories of the Plazuela, and post them on a wall, which

was part of the gallery installation (Gutiérrez H. and Törmä 2017).

In the second stage of the study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with Don Miguel again and the staff of his Café. To understand urban life, sociability, and collective memories in the Plazuela, we employed a questionnaire. We received 125 responses of which 82 completed all the questions. Of the responses, 83% were received online and 17% were collected on-site<sup>3</sup>. We calculated Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients between the questions and based our analysis on statistically significant (confidence level 99%) correlations, focussing on correlations that are 0.25 or higher in absolute value. These correlations helped us to understand whether visitors are aware of the spatial qualities or the revitalisation strategies of the Plazuela and whether friendship and social bonds are associated to memories and influence visitors’ attachment towards the square.

## Origins of the Plazuela de la Campana in Veracruz

During the Spanish colony in the sixteenth century, Veracruz began as a camp related to commercial activities at a beach near the present day city in 1519. It took more than seven decades to settle the town in a permanent place until 1597 (García de León 2011). The urban grid was planned until the early seventeenth century, in accordance to the *Ordenanzas de las Indias* (Ordinances or Law of the Indies), a Spanish Royal Decree of 1573 (Crouch and Mundigo 1977; Segarra Lagunes 2015). In the Spanish Americas, colonial towns were designed with specific physical characteristics in their urban layout, referred to as the *traza*: ‘a grid-plan design, featuring square- or rectangular-shaped blocks, and streets that intersect at 90-degree angles’ (Socolow and Johnson 1981, p. 33). The *traza* of the Spanish colonial towns was later referred to as the ‘historic centre’. Mexican national authorities protected historic centres since the early 1970s.

The Ordinances of the Indies proposed only a particular ‘grid-plan’ or ‘chess-board’ urban layout and did not include particular design principles (Crouch and Mundigo 1977, p. 400). Colonial cities included a central plaza occupying the space of one or more blocks, located close to the geographical centre of each town (Crouch and Mundigo 1977; Mundigo and Crouch 1977). The town council, the main cathedral, the administrative centre, and commercial areas were placed around the central plaza or

<sup>2</sup> We interviewed Miguel Ángel García Cortés (Don Miguel), who initiated the music and dance events in the Plazuela de la Campana, his daughter, staff of the Café Auténtico Veracruzano, the director and chronicler of Museum of the City and Veracruz, the director of Culture and Tourism of the Veracruz town hall, a musician and frequent visitors of the Plazuela.

<sup>3</sup> We conducted the questionnaire in site and in Facebook: Café Auténtico Veracruzano (a private profile) and in public groups *Plazuela de la Campana*, *Veracruz a través del Tiempo* and *El Viejo y Nuevo Veracruz Fotografía*. The Culture and Tourism Department of the Municipality also shared our questionnaire.



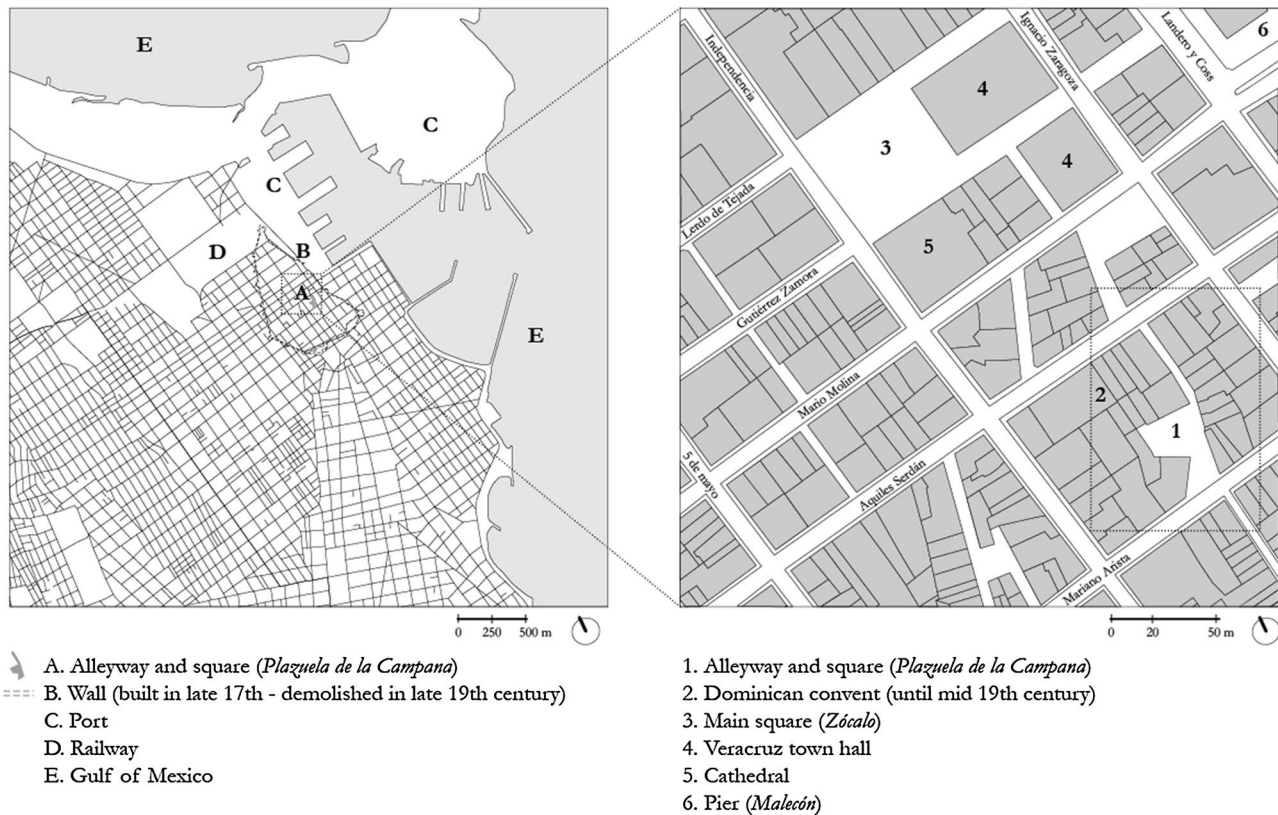


Fig. 1 Map of the historic centre of Veracruz and the Plazuela de la Campana

*Zócalo*, which became a public space of political power and civil life. The urban and social function of the central plaza remained over the centuries. There were also secondary squares and *plazuelas* (small squares often close to churches, convents or monasteries), which served almost as an extension of churches and hosted events such as local festivities and religious ceremonies (Foster 1960; Socolow and Johnson 1981).

Veracruz, as other port towns in the Spanish Americas, included a wall for protection that was demolished by the end of the nineteenth century (Fig. 1, letter B). The origins of the Plazuela de la Campana (Fig. 1, number 1) comes from the Spanish colonial period and the Ordinances of the Indies. The Plazuela was initially a back patio of the Santo Domingo monastery of the Dominican Order built in the early seventeenth century. Since the church did not have a bell tower and the bell was too heavy to be lifted, it was located in the Dominican patio (later the Plazuela de la Campana) to call to the services. The Dominican Order was very wealthy and were the patrons of the Holy Inquisition in the Spanish colonies. Later, like most of the ecclesiastical buildings, the Santo Domingo monastery, including its square, was appropriated by the State in 1857, during a period referred to as the War of Reform. The State

confiscated many properties and appropriated key functions of the Catholic Church, such as marriages, administration of cemeteries, and public spaces.

For many decades, residential buildings and houses surrounded the Plazuela. Older people still remember the square as it was in the early and mid-twentieth century: a place where children played, families gathered, and lovers met. From the 1970s as Veracruz expanded, families left eventually the historic centre for suburbs. The main use of the historic centre was minor shops and offices related to the town hall, port, and customs. The historic centre became decadent and dangerous, and the Plazuela, as many other public spaces, turned into a shady urine-reeking quarter of prostitution and the homeless.

## Dance and music in the Port's history

The culture in Veracruz stems from its colonial history as one of the first port towns in the Spanish continental Americas and from its tropical coastal location (García de León 2009, 2011). Veracruz is well known as a bustling place with multiple cultural influences. Music, public life, noise, and social events became characteristics of the local culture.





Cuban music genres, such as *danzón* (a slow partner dance), became important in Veracruz due to its Afro-Caribbean heritage and traffic connections to Cuban ports. Music and dance events in public spaces marked an important feature of the urban life in Latin American and Caribbean port cities. In Veracruz, dance events took place in patios in the periphery of the city. In the late nineteenth century, social cooperatives institutionalised *danzón* in the historic centre (García de León 2009). At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, despite their bad maintenance and unhealthy conditions of urban areas, courtyards and patios were places not only for social manifestation and protest, but also for social events such as parties as well as stages for local artists and playgrounds for hundreds of children (García de León 2009).

From 1925 to 1932, the port expansion and the construction of the first railway in Mexico increased the population and local migration in Veracruz (Escudero 2015) (Fig. 1, letters C and D). As the population grew and the city expanded, the nightlife increased considerably. Between the 1920s and 1980s, there was a significant change in the political and economic power, which finished with the major economic crisis in Mexico in the 1990s. Eventually, the historic centre lost its residential uses and the crisis in the early 1990s contributed to the abandonment and deterioration of the centre.

*Danzón* and Caribbean music almost disappeared in Veracruz. Two relevant incidents reinstated music events in public space in the 1980s (Galván 2017). First, the Mexican national government recognised ‘historic centres’ as protected areas in Mexico in 1972 and national policies implemented a variety of conservation strategies. Second, in 1987, the State Government of Veracruz created the Veracruz’s Institute of Culture (IVEC), which aimed to foster and reactivate traditions by organising cultural events and teaching folkloric music and dance. The increased popularity of Cuban music, especially *son montuno* and *danzón* in public space has reinforced the idea that they are something ‘Veracruzano’, although they are not (Malcomson 2012). Similar to other historic centres in Mexico, in Veracruz, this idea continued after the creation of IVEC and a ‘Cultural Rescue’ programme, the urban policies to protect historic centres, and local programmes to increase the tourism.

### The revitalisation of the *Plazuela* with music and dance

The colonial *Plazuela* had been an integral part of the religious and commercial function of the centre. The square was more central when Veracruz was a small town in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. However, as the city expanded, the *Plazuela* and the historic centre lost its spatial



1. Bell and stage
2. Dominican convent (until mid 19th century)
3. *Café Auténtico Veracruzano*
4. *Restaurante Pardiñolas*

Fig. 2 Detail of *Plazuela de la Campana*

centrality, but it continued as a place of political and commercial significance. The *Plazuela* became a place suited for certain types of crime: the odds of drugs crime. Since the square is located in a less visible part of the historic centre and the residents left the surrounding buildings, there was little social surveillance, as research in sociability and crime has shown in other contexts (Jacobs 1961; Tarkhanyan 2015). The *Plazuela* today has few passers-by except for the weekend events organised there, in comparison to the adjacent streets and its shape. The *Plazuela*’s shape was an almost enclosed patio, providing corners invisible from the streets (Fig. 2) (Gutiérrez H. and Törmä 2017). However, it is close to the international port and the Zócalo, which have remained as a traditional hub of cultural activities and public life (Fig. 1).



Fig. 3 Photo of the Plazuela de la Campana in a weekday morning

The Plazuela decayed during the 1970s and 1980s. It was a dire condition in which Miguel Ángel García Cortés (Don Miguel), a retired architect returning to Veracruz, found the square in the mid-1990s. Since 1996, Don Miguel began a strategy to improve the physical qualities and clean the Plazuela, aiming to reclaim the public square, of which his first memories are from his childhood (Gutiérrez H. and Törmä 2017). Don Miguel opened the *Café Auténtico Veracruzano* (Fig. 2, number 3) in the ground floor of a building in the middle part of the alley and facing the square and the bell. Coincidentally, the Café was located in a place with the best visual control of the Plazuela (Törmä and Gutiérrez H. 2020). By extending the café to the square and arranging events supporting Don Miguel's business, the revitalisation developed into a project to reinstate traditions and folklore—'old Veracruz' for the local people as well as for tourists. The historic centre's conservation strategy fuelled the Plazuela revitalisation (*Gaceta Municipal* 1996). Later, another restaurant (*Pardiñolas*) opened in the square and collaborated with the Café (Fig. 2, number 4). Figure 3 shows the Plazuela from one of the back corners far from passing people.

In the first years, Don Miguel implemented a variety of events that aimed to attract visitors to the Plazuela, such as school events and ceremonies, fashion runways, book presentations, contests and clowns festivals, among other things (García Cortés 2011). However, the popularity of the folkloric music and dance was remarkable, and Don Miguel began to hire bands to play a variety of popular genres, of which *son Cubano* and *son montuno* were most favoured. At the beginning of the 2000s, the municipality brought the *danzón* events to the Plazuela, which earlier took place in Parque Zamora, a nearby park. In consequence, Plazuela de la Campana transformed into the square of music and dance. Perhaps some residents remember how music and dance events happened in



Fig. 4 Photo of dance and music events in the Plazuela de la Campana

other public spaces in Veracruz. Thus, the new events in the Plazuela became quickly accepted as a 'tradition'.

### How music and dance events foster affections

The findings on the Plazuela portray how music and dance have orchestrated social relations, consolidated into a tradition, and changed the image of the square during two decades. While Don Miguel had all kinds of events on the Plazuela, only music and dance have continued—for a reason: we argue in the following that music and dance have engaged people in the place most effectively and that this engagement has elevated the regard of the square and its events as heritage worth preserving and improving. As Fig. 4 shows in the crowded square during music events in weekends.

What seems to be now a tradition of weekly gatherings in the Plazuela, in the sense of 'tradition' implying a generation-spanning history, has only been there for two decades. However, there is a distinct reminiscence of the gatherings and dance events organised in the public patios in the areas outside the city wall at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which may have left a trace in collective memory and rendered the activity in the square culturally familiar. Remarkably, three-quarters of the respondents of the questionnaire consider the square and its events inseparable and complementary, regardless of why and how often they go there. Only every tenth thinks that the events in the Plazuela could be as well elsewhere. The mental coupling of the events and their setting indicates that they have consolidated into a cohesive perception of the space, what Henri Lefebvre calls a 'spatial practice' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 38). Don Miguel implemented intuitively a powerful strategy to

improve the Plazuela—the square appears to casual visitors as of ‘old Veracruz’, although the nostalgic association was not intentional (Fig. 4).

Don Miguel’s events were possible because he found an opportunity in the regulatory framework of public space. He obtained an unconventional concession to set out café tables in the square and negotiated with the local authority into unusual permission to use the square for events, as long as they are free for all visitors. His timing was fortunate: the rescue project of the Plazuela gained momentum from the strategies of IVEC and policies to protect historical urban areas and attract tourism. Frequent visitors of Veracruz’s historic centre consider Don Miguel the ‘guardian’ of the Plazuela. He started cleaning the square by devising events, thus aiming to build a welcoming image of the square, which was notorious of drug trading, thievery, and sex. Local media praised his initiative, but he has admitted that the hardest task is to keep up the continuity of the events. The struggle to keep the Plazuela lively is likely to be perpetual because it is little frequented besides the events and because its location and form make it prone to misdemeanours.

Many visitors, who responded to the questionnaire, have known the Plazuela since their childhood. At least half of them have first visited the square later in their life—significantly, only some years before they have started to frequent it. The distinct correspondence indicates how effectively the events of the Plazuela engage people in them. However, the few years’ lags from the first visit to becoming a frequenter are notable, too. It has only little to do with making friends there. The lag may be simply the time necessary for the habit of frequenting to root.

Robust social networks build with a regular visit to the dances, and they strengthen the relationship to the Plazuela. Around half of the visitors have made over 10 or more friends in the square and a larger proportion knows several people visiting it. The more often people visit the square the more acquaintances they make there. Importantly, people coming to dance and music are also coming to the Plazuela for their friends—and typically as often. It seems that dance captivates effectively. Furthermore, strong friendships create a strong connection with the place where they made these connections. For instance, the friendships of regular visitors to the events continue outside of the square such friendships make people likelier to be generally interested in various kinds of events in the Plazuela.

One’s first visit to the Plazuela is associated with how people remember the square has changed over time. Nonetheless, also one’s social connections to the place shape remembering. The appearance of the square changed drastically in refurbishment in 2003. Many older visitors remember the Plazuela has been different than it is today. Half of the respondents have known the square only after its refurbishment. It may be that they remember it as it is today



Fig. 5 Photo of *danzón* events in the Plazuela de la Campana

since their first visit. Yet some of these visitors remember the Plazuela today, only during the last years, despite having known the square for a longer period. Their personal memories correlate with their frequenting clearly. Most of the visitors started remembering the place, as they perceive it today from the time they became frequenters. This finding of frequency and memory has parallels to emerging theories of memory on the judgment of regency (Hintzman 2010).

The historical memory of the Plazuela, on the other hand, has to do with the number of friends one has made on-site. Newer visitors are more likely to know better the history of the events when they have more friends made in the square. The finding of historical memory accords with Halbwachs concept of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992). The findings on autobiographical and historical memory demonstrate the dynamics of memory and spatial practice.

Various activities and social groups tend to occupy different parts of the Plazuela during different days and hours. The pocket shape of the square provides privacy rarely in the historic centre: an undisturbed nook where people rest under the few trees and a hidden spot for lovers to kiss. Visitors use the Plazuela differently during music events (Fig. 2). Different social groups in the dance events use different parts of the square, and the furniture (tables and chairs) is arranged differently. In the *son montuno* events, (Saturday and Friday nights) younger groups tend to dance close to Arista Street, while older people stay in front of the band and near the furniture lining the square. Differently, in the *danzón* events (Sunday evening), which is more popular among older groups, men pay for chairs for themselves and their dance couples (Fig. 5). In both events, some visitors book tables and consume drinks from the café, others find public benches around the stage and some remain standing between dances. We conjecture that the form and arrangement of the Plazuela influence how social networks arise



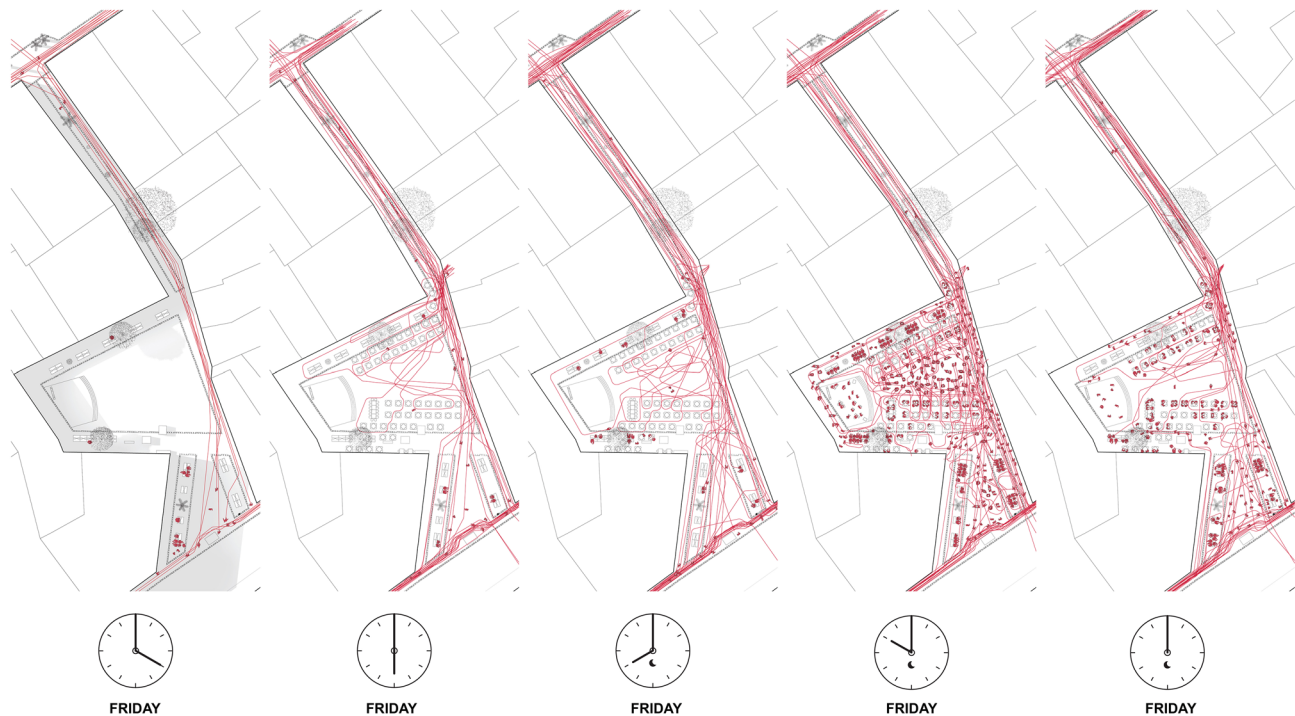


Fig. 6 The Plazuela through the hours

and memories consequently diffuse. On the other hand, the dance by its nature mingles people and can be precisely the kind of activity that bridges social groups differentiated even in a small space.

The weekend events keep the square alive, despite its physical decay and poor maintenance, and this is what most of the respondents considered meaningful for the local culture (Fig. 6 shows the Plazuela's transformation in a Friday from 4:00 pm to 12:00 am). Notably, the high estimation of the cultural value of the Plazuela has a strong correspondence with a unique personal value. The various estimations of the place—personal, cultural, architectural, and of the events—are largely interrelated. However, personal value is moreover associated with knowing the history of the events, visitor frequent the place for one's friends there, feelings of happiness that derive especially from dance, and considering the events matching the space. The finding resonates with Yi-Fu Tuan's argument of awareness of the past being an important element in the love of a place (Tuan 1974, p. 99). Along these lines, we propose that various aspects have to do with deepening the meaningfulness of a place, foster affection to it, and may develop into general esteem of the place.

## Conclusions

The study of the Plazuela de la Campana shows how some groups have re-appropriated the square after a period of neglect and its value as heritage was elevated. We suggest that meaningfulness of a place stems from knowing its history among other things and forming friendships and happiness associated with the place creates personal value, which again translates into a general cultural appreciation of the place (Figs. 4 and 5). In addition to this appreciation, the repetition of the events in the Plazuela for more than two decades has established a social and spatial practice that will lay the foundations of the square as heritage (Fig. 6). The case of Plazuela has described how a nostalgic image contributed to revitalising a deteriorated historical square and overpowered its infamy. It discussed to what extent this image was grounded on traditions and memories, and how the weekend events arranged in the Plazuela have created an artificial urban rhythm reminiscent of the image of 'old Veracruz'; artificial in the sense that there are few passers-by besides the attraction of the events.

As much as the rescue project of the Plazuela is about revitalisation, it is also about forgetting an old image of notoriety. Intuitively, Don Miguel created a new tradition of music and dance from a nearly extinct one. Perhaps the collective memory of earlier traditions explains the imaginal potency of the new one. It seems that 'planned forgetting' indeed operates 'not by cancellation, but by superimposition;



not by absence, but by multiplying presences' (Eco 1988, pp. 254–261).

The weekend events are the attractor of Plazuela that complements the otherwise little daytime activity there (Figs. 3 and 6). To maintain the liveliness that it would not have only as a passageway, and that is necessary to keep it safe and attractive, a tradition is needed to bring people in repeatedly. Presumably, not all activity that gathers people to public space shortly has the same long-lasting impact as the music and dance events. Dance and music seem to have an ideal balance of mingling people by the means of a formal code that is culturally familiar across social groups. This mingling fosters the creation of social contacts and attachment to the square, as people are likely to return for their friends, consequently supporting the establishment of a tradition.

The social dynamics of music and dance have paved the way for future diversification: the extensive social networks that dance events create make friendships likelier to continue outside of it. Such shared attachment to the square is strong. The Plazuela becomes as cherished as the activity: people who have an emotional attachment to the square in this way would also be interested to come there for other events. It remains to be seen whether music and dance have been a kind of seed activity that eventually attracts more bustle to the Plazuela.

The events would not have been possible without the government interests to revitalise historic areas and conserve local traditions of folkloric music and dance. The local authority has planned a variety of strategies to attract visitors, but most efforts have failed mainly for the lack of investment, institutional complexity, and bureaucracy. As the semi-official 'guardian' of the Plazuela, Don Miguel has kept its image welcoming, and now his daughter aims to continue with his legacy. Moreover, the appearance of new businesses in the square might attract new kinds of visitors.

The sense of togetherness in the Plazuela nurtured in the events would perhaps not have been achieved in a planning-led proposal. Emerging urban planning strategies look into flexible social frameworks because conventional masterplan or planning-led regeneration cannot by itself build a community (Bishop and Williams 2012, p. 186). Communities consist of a multiplicity of uses and activities that are interconnected and it can take many years to build up robust social networks and practices, as this study has demonstrated. Don Miguel's strategy is an example of a privately initiated model of 'alternative planning', which exploits borrowed traditions, collective memory, and the social impact of dance and music in a revitalisation process. The unconventional model of private stewardship of public space can offer inspiration for planning practice, revitalising other historic public spaces in Veracruz and Mexico.

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