

The Las Nieves neighborhood: A description of its territory from the perspective of quality of life and health *

Las Nieves: una descripción de su territorio desde la perspectiva de la calidad de vida y la salud

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe the territory of the Las Nieves neighborhood from the perspective of quality of life and health. *Methodology:* This descriptive and narrative study was developed in two phases: the first phase was a documentary study on the history of the neighborhood, the limits of its territory, its public transportation routes and the main infrastructures that compose it. The second phase consisted of a tour through the neighborhood. Based on the data collected during the two phases, the study described what was observed in the neighborhood and its relation to the history and present reality of the sector. *Results:* The history of Las Nieves goes back to the origins of Bogotá; the neighborhood emerged around the church and the pile of water established in this sector and became a site of manufacturing, commercial, and leisure activities—legal and illegal. The deterioration of the neighborhood was only reversed starting in the late twentieth century, thanks to the private initiatives of universities and companies and to public policies aimed at recovering the center of Bogotá. *Conclusion:* Territory and population are two elements that mutually determine each other. Their confluence generates the quality of life and health of the inhabitants, or the lack thereof. Las Nieves is no exception, even more so when it is a neighborhood of great cultural and historical wealth that has shaped its territory in a particular way, which makes it a stronghold for the city of Bogotá.

Keywords: territory, Las Nieves neighborhood, population, health, quality of life.

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RESUMEN

Objetivo: describir el territorio del barrio Las Nieves desde la perspectiva de la calidad de vida y la salud. *Metodología:* estudio de tipo descriptivo y narrativo desarrollado en dos fases: la primera fue un estudio documental sobre la historia del barrio, los límites del territorio, sus rutas de transporte público y las principales infraestructuras que lo componen; la segunda consistió en un recorrido por el barrio. Con los datos de las dos fases se describió lo observado y su relación con la historia y la realidad presente del barrio. *Resultados:* la historia de Las Nieves se remonta a los orígenes de Bogotá; emergió en torno a la iglesia y la pila de agua que se instalaron en este sector y se transformó en un sitio de actividad fabril, comercial y lúdica, legal e ilegal. El deterioro del barrio solo se revirtió a partir de finales del siglo XX, gracias a iniciativas privadas de universidades y empresas y a políticas públicas orientadas a recuperar el centro de Bogotá. *Conclusión:* territorio y población son dos elementos que se interdeterminan. De su confluencia se genera la calidad de vida y la salud de la que gozan o carecen los pobladores. Las Nieves no es la excepción, aún más cuando es un barrio de amplia riqueza cultural e histórica que ha configurado su territorio de forma particular, lo que lo convierte en un baluarte para Bogotá.

Palabras clave: territorio, barrio Las Nieves, población, salud, calidad de vida.

INTRODUCTION

Quality of life and health are two concepts that can largely be understood as synonyms. This statement is based on the definitions and notions that have been developed around them. Thus, quality of life is defined as a dynamic process linked to the life cycle of an individual in a specific social context, where this individual has the possibility of living a dignified life, thanks to a capacity to develop his or her potentials autonomously and in compliance with the objectives of the society he or she lives in (1). On the other hand, health is understood, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, which goes beyond the mere absence of affections or diseases (2). As it is evident, both concepts are centered on achieving the welfare of an individual.

For this reason, the WHO established the concept of quality of life with respect to health as the “individuals’ personal perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, values, and interests” (3-5).

Moreover, a new concept has been coined in the field of public health: population health. This refers to individual health causes (genetic, cultural,

micro-environmental), population health causes (environmental, contextual, economic, political, psychosocial), and possible errors (e.g. occupational causes) (6). This concept, although still under discussion, focuses on identifying the main factors that affect the health of populations, seeking to develop strategies to improve their health.

Thus, both quality of life and health are, above all, subjective concepts that can only be evaluated individually. They also seek to understand how people perceive and achieve a good life, through preserving their physical integrity and developing their mental capacity, while participating in the ideals defined by the social group they form part of, since, as Rawls affirms, “We are to suppose, then, that each individual has a rational plan of life drawn up subject to the conditions that confront him and also permit the harmonious satisfaction of his interests” (7). Therefore, quality of life and health are the result of the life cycle and the conditions of the environment in which each person lives, since they are directly linked to the development of the individual’s abilities and potential.

Consequently, quality of life and health have been a constant preoccupation of human beings (3), especially since their fulfillment is determined by social, political, historical, cultural, and eco-

conomic contexts, which all unfold in a space called territory. This concept is defined as the place where human beings develop their existence, as their life project is framed in a social context that influences its realization (8). Therefore, it is logical that society must provide individuals with the necessary conditions to achieve the plan of life they deem valuable (9).

Thus, when seeking to understand the phenomena that determine what a good life is, it is fundamental to be familiar with the particularities of the space in which individuals interact in order to develop planning and policy implementation processes that maintain or improve the quality of life and health of the inhabitants. In this sense, health professionals often forget that the health/disease process is rooted in the territory their patients come from. This fragmentation generates a distance between the world of life and the clinic, which, in many cases, results in actions that fail to produce positive transformations in the quality of life and health of the individuals or populations. For this reason, people must be understood in their biological, psychological, and social dimensions, both individually and within their families and communities (10).

Thus, studies of territory in the area of health have gained relevance, particularly due to three aspects: first, the existence of contextual factors in the geographical area that determine health, such as urbanism, productive sector, leisure spaces, public and private services, as well as their sociocultural characteristics. Second, a clear identification of those areas within the territory that have negative social and health indicators, which facilitates the planning of actions that would allow their transformation; and third, a greater availability of data about the geographical area than about the individuals who live there (8).

As a result, this approach demonstrated an interdependency between the two fundamental variables that explain health conditions and needs: territory and population. This pair is expressed in the form

of networks, understood as complex structures of communication established around a set of objectives that guarantee the unity of purpose and, at the same time, flexibility in their execution, thanks to their capacity to adapt to the operating environment (11). For this reason, a direct approach to the particularities of a territory based on the experience of visiting and “feeling” it must constitute one of the first steps a researcher need to take in preparation for later interaction with the inhabitants.

On the other hand, since the industrial revolution, cities have turned into places where there is a greater concentration of population. However, this process has not been harmonious: on the contrary, cities have become polarized and fragmented spaces. Thus, the city has been configured as a territory with differentially marked spaces: residential, industrial production, service production, recreation, among others, which determine the conditions of quality of life and health for its inhabitants (8). Therefore, a knowledge of the spatial characteristics of the city’s territorial units contributes to a better understanding of the phenomenon, as well as to the development of strategies aimed at achieving the well-being of the inhabitants.

For this reason, it is necessary to study in depth the social, economic, geographic, cultural, and historical aspects of the neighborhoods, which helps define a more useful conceptual framework of analysis on how and why urban territory affects quality of life and health (8). As a result of the above reflections, this research focused on a descriptive approach to the Las Nieves neighborhood, a territorial unit, located in the center of Bogotá, with a rich historical tradition. For this effect, this study was designed to answer the following question: How is the environment of the Las Nieves neighborhood in the city of Bogotá?, with the purpose of taking a first step towards a better understanding of the quality of life and health of its inhabitants.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative and descriptive research aimed to get to know the territory inhabited by the population of the Las Nieves neighborhood. For this purpose, two phases were developed: during the first phase, a literature review was carried out to collect and analyze information about the Las Nieves neighborhood. This review began with an investigation of the documents that present the history of the neighborhood, followed by a topographical description of its present limits, in accordance with the geopolitical division of Bogotá. Finally, public health infrastructures and means of transport in the neighborhood were examined in detail.

During the second phase, direct observation was carried out, following a route that was planned using Google Maps (12). Thus, the territory was divided into two areas (one in an east-west sense, following the streets, and the other in a south-north sense, following the avenues); these areas, in turn, were subdivided into blocks (fourteen in total). In this way, it was possible to cover the whole neighborhood, as detailed below.

AREA NO. 1. EAST-WEST SENSE, FOLLOWING THE STREETS

In area No. 1, the tour was carried out, block by block, in an ascending order:

- Block 1: 24th Street, from the 10th to the 3rd Avenue.
- Block 2: 23rd Street, from the 10th to the 3rd Avenue.
- Block 3: 22nd Street, from the 10th to the 3rd Avenue.
- Block 4: 21st Street, from the 10th to the 3rd Avenue.
- Block 5: 20th Street, from the 10th to the 3rd Avenue.

- Block 6: 19th Street, from the 10th to the 3rd Avenue.



FIGURE 1. Route map in area No. 1 (streets)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Google Maps (12).

AREA NO. 2. NORTH-SOUTH SENSE, FOLLOWING THE AVENUES

Similarly, in area No. 2, the tour continued in an ascending order, block by block:

- Block 7: 3rd Avenue, from the 26th to the 19th Street.
- Block 8: 4A Avenue, from the 26th to the 23rd Street.
- Block 9: 4th Avenue, from the 26th to the 19th Street.
- Block 10: 5th Avenue, from the 24th to the 19th Street.
- Block 11: 7th Avenue, from the 26th to the 19th Street.
- Block 12: 8th Avenue, from the 26th to the 19th Street.
- Block 13: 9th Avenue, from the 26th to the 19th Street.
- Block 14: 10th Avenue, from the 26th to the 19th Street.



FIGURE 2. Route map in area No. 2 (avenues)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Google Maps (12).

The purpose of the tour was to obtain a topographic view of the area, to identify the existence or lack of health centers in the neighborhood, and to become familiar with the main infrastructures and important sites in the area, in order to combine the information gathered from the literature with direct observation by the research team.

The observations made during the tour were recorded in research field journals; the narratives and perceptions are transcribed literally in the results section. The purpose was to present what the field researchers felt while doing their work. It is important to have in mind that researchers are not metaphysical entities, but subjects who perceive and have feelings just like those who are being investigated, perhaps even more, as this is certainly not their reality, they are not used to this context, which makes them feel, think, and live differently. Moreover, it is these emotions that mark the course of the research, given that they create perceptions, criteria, and biases that influence the results, although in the least possible way (13). As Bourdieu points out, the intention is

not to show “reality” as a unique and invariable whole, but as part of a reality perceived by a particular individual (14).

RESULTS

The results are presented below as follows: a) first phase, which presents what is found in the literature, and b) second phase, which reports the empirical findings and narratives of the researchers after the tour of the neighborhood.

FIRST PHASE: LITERATURE REVIEW

History of the Las Nieves neighborhood

The origin of the Las Nieves neighborhood goes back almost to the foundation of Bogotá. By 1598, when the city was divided into parishes, Las Nieves constituted its northern nucleus. Its boundaries were the following: on the south, the San Francisco river (present Jiménez Avenue); on the north, the Recollect Church of San Diego; on the east, the foot of the hills, and on the west, the Alameda Vieja (current 13rd Avenue) (15).

The history of the neighborhood has been linked to the history of its church (16). Its first building was elaborated in 1581, when, by mandate of conqueror Cristóbal Bernal, the construction of the chapel began in what, for the time, was the extreme north end of the city (at present, 7th Avenue with 20th Street). This chapel was blessed by Archbishop Fray Luis Zapata de Cárdenas in 1585, in a solemn act that represented the foundation of what today is known as the Parish Church of Las Nieves, the oldest one in the city (15).

In 1587, thanks to the donation of a property attached to the church, the church-plaza structure was formed, which is a classic complex based on the Spanish model of urban construction. Later, in 1665, it was complemented with the installation

of a water basin, which remained in place until 1910, when it was replaced by the sculpture of Francisco José de Caldas, national hero (15,17).

In 1596, the church was devastated by fire, and later rebuilt. In spite of the improvements made, the building became small due to population growth. For this reason, priest Jacinto Cuadrado Solanilla decided to demolish the old construction in 1643, aiming to enrich its architectural features and expand its capacity to receive parishioners. This is illustrated in the following phrase coined in those years: “The new church, with better masonry and tile roof, was so spacious that the street’s width had to be considerably reduced” (15,18).

Thus, the religious devotion and fervor that the parish of Las Nieves inspired in worshipers were the reasons why, in the beginning, this neighborhood became an attractive sector for the inhabitants of the city, who visited it frequently (15,16). Years later, in 1670, not only the church, but also the plaza and the pile became an important meeting point for the settlers: it was established as a space frequently used for social gathering. After the 1918 earthquake, the restoration process of the church was initiated in 1922, and ended in 1930. This reconstruction imposed on the structure the Byzantine Romanesque style that is still visible today (15).

Around 1774, a royal decree ordered the modification of the city’s political division: parishes became quarters; due to this, the neighborhood began to be called the Las Nieves Quarters and it was subdivided into two sectors: East Las Nieves and West Las Nieves. This quarter began to receive the population that recently migrated to Bogotá, which resulted in an ethnic mixture with indigenous peoples who had been relocated to the northeastern zone since the beginning of the colonial period. This process of *mestizaje* is the basis of the future social and economic character of the neighborhood. Thus, with a segregating perspective, the upper class inhabitants of the

Candelaria neighborhood started to see Las Nieves as a place of vagrants, prostitutes, indigents, and delinquents, who needed to be controlled. In this way, the neighborhood began to be characterized not as much by its religious devotion as by the existence of brothels, stores, and *chicha* breweries in its interior, which represented an attack against public morality according to contemporary customs (15,16).

Moreover, the Casa de Expósitos y Recogidas, which first was located in the Hospital San Juan de Dios and later in San Victorino, was transferred, in 1774, to East Las Nieves, with the name of Hospicio Real de Santafé, which worked in the buildings of the old Jesuit novitiate. Initially, orphans and “deviant” women were committed there, following a philosophy of Christian charity; later, this place sheltered beggars and vagrants, from a public assistance perspective (15).

This negative view on the social context of Las Nieves was transformed starting in the middle of the 19th century and it became the home of artisans and humble people: masters of painting, sculptors, goldsmiths, silversmiths, carpenters, cabinetmakers, masters of architecture, among others. In this way, little by little, it turned into a neighborhood that based its economy on the trade of locally produced goods, reason why it became an important zone for provisions for the rest of the city. Artisans living in the neighborhood became a political stronghold for the fight against the commercial bourgeoisie that was against local products and harassed the humble, as they considered that their ethnicity, clothing, and customs were despicable (15,19).

For the first half of the 20th century, important factories were located in Las Nieves, among them Vidrios Fenicia, Lozas Faenza, Ricardo Camacho Building Materials, Cerveza La Florida, José María Sierra alcoholic liquors, and La Libertad Candles and Soaps, Ángel Mario Tamayo, Ricardo Duarte, Trinidad Salazar, and Juan B. de Brigard (15).

In terms of health, Fábrica Fáenza deserves a special mention for the fact that it provided medical care, free remedies, and paid leave in case of illness to its workers. This factory, following the autonomous decision of its owner José Saiz, was transformed into Teatro Faenza, which was declared a national monument in 1975 and currently is preserved by the Universidad Central as one of its main auditoriums (15,18).

Similarly, the commercial sector was strengthened in this period, thanks to the arrival of foreigners who introduced innovative business ideas, such as the city's first flower shop and what could be considered today as the first big store with large areas: Tía, owned by the Steuer family, of Czech origin. Likewise, foreigners, particularly Jews who were called *Polish*, implemented sales on credit (15,18). Today, although the manufacturing vocation of the sector has been almost entirely lost, trade is still one of the main activities in the neighborhood.

Las Nieves also has the honor of being the city's main cinematographic projection hub, a process that began in 1912 with the opening of the Olympia Hall. Then, in a first stage, different theaters were founded: Bogotá, Astral, Roxy, and Faenza, followed by the El Cid, the Mogador, the Ambassador, and Terrace Pasteur theaters as well as several cinemas (15). At present, many of them have been transformed for other uses or demolished and very few continue in operation.

Additionally, a wide cultural offering began to be available in Las Nieves since the 1950s: Cinemateca Distrital, Sala de Fundadores at the Universidad Central, the Center for Art and Culture at the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, the Jorge Eliécer Gaitán District Theater, the National Library, and the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá (15).

Nevertheless, prostitution continued its activity in Las Nieves, especially since 1907, when the neigh-

borhood was included in the zone of tolerance or red zone defined by the Regulation on Prostitution (15). This marked the future of Las Nieves, which suffered a constant deterioration of its living and security conditions during the second half of the 20th century, which led to the displacement of traditional families and commerce, as well as to a devaluation of land and infrastructure in the neighborhood.

This situation only began to be remedied in the early years of the 1990s, thanks mainly to the private initiatives of universities such as the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano and Universidad Central. Among the actions taken, in 2006, the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano committed its students of all the programs of the institution to get involved with the neighborhood; for example, Business Administration students developed a program to provide a business plan for storekeepers in the sector. In the same way, there was a contribution to the architectural environment through the construction of an auditorium and several new buildings at the university. For its part, the Universidad Central took charge of the rehabilitation of the above mentioned Teatro Faenza, in addition to the México and Bogotá theaters (15,19).

Today, the Las Nieves neighborhood is in a period of change, during which an increasing number of cultural centers and university institutions, in addition to cafés, cinemas, theaters, bars, recreation sites and playgrounds, have emerged with strength, which has boosted the recovery and improvement of the sector. Consequently, the neighborhood has become, once again, habitable for families, which has been motivated by Bogotá's public policies that have stimulated population concentration in the so-called *enlarged center*, of which Las Nieves forms part. Similarly, the neighborhood is increasingly established as a tourist attraction with routes that run through its transcendent historic spaces (20).

Limits

Today, within the geographical division of the city, the Las Nieves neighborhood is part of the locality of Santa Fe, which is subdivided into five zonal planning units (UPZ for its acronym in Spanish): Las Nieves is one of them. The Las Nieves UPZ has a total area of 172.41 hectares; in 2015, it had 13,783 inhabitants, mostly classified in middle and low socioeconomic strata. However, it is worth clarifying that the Las Nieves neighborhood—subject of this investigation—is only one of those that conform this UPZ; the others are La Alameda, La Capuchina, Veracruz, and Santa Inés (21). Currently, the neighborhood's area has an almost rectangular shape that borders, on the north, with 26th Street or El Dorado Avenue, on the south with 19th Street, on the east with 3rd Avenue, and, finally, on the west with 10th Avenue (19).

The neighborhood is part of the so-called *center* of the city. The streets and avenues that demarcate its territory are of great importance: 26th Street, in addition to bordering with Parque de la Independencia (one of the oldest parks in Bogotá), connects the city center with El Dorado Airport; 19th Street runs through Bogotá from the eastern hills, through the Las Aguas sector, to the industrial zone of Puente Aranda. 3rd Avenue connects the Historical Center (area of great tourist and commercial activity, as well as nucleus of the political power of the city and the country) with the ring road, which allows a quick access to the north part of the city. Finally, 10th Avenue comes from the south side of the city and it ends a few blocks north of Las Nieves, in the sector of San Diego; this avenue is characterized by its commercial activity, as well as by the presence of delinquency and prostitution, factors that negatively affect its image.

Moreover, 7th Avenue or *calle real* crosses the Las Nieves neighborhood in a north-south sense; it is one of the oldest avenues of the city, where the Parish Church of Las Nieves is located, which, as

explained, is strongly linked to the origin of the neighborhood. Similarly, the Colpatria Tower was built on this avenue, which, for many years, was the tallest building in the city, until the BD Bacatá building was recently erected, also located in Las Nieves, in the intersection between 19th Avenue with 5th Street.

Health centers

An analysis of the offer of public health centers in the locality of Santa Fe found that the only UPZ that does not have this type of infrastructure is Las Nieves (21) (Table 1). Additionally, during the tour it was observed that the private offer is limited to a few doctor's and dentist's offices. The only important health infrastructure that previously existed in the neighborhood was the medical care provided at the Bogotá Telecommunication Company (ETB for its acronym in Spanish), whose service was restricted to the families of the union workers of the company, called Sinrateléfonos, which was disassembled a few years ago.

TABLE 1. Health centers in the locality of Santa Fe

UPZ	OCC	IMCC	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 3	BCU	PCU	TOTAL
91 Sagrado Corazón		3	3				6
92 La Macarena	1				1		2
93 Las Nieves							0
95 Las Cruces						1	1
96 Lourdes		1				3	4
RPU Cerros Orientales				1			1
Total Santa Fe	1	4	3	1	1	4	14
%	7.1	28.6	21.4	7.1	7.1	28.6	100

OCC: outpatient care center; IMCC: immediate medical care center; BCU: basic care unit; PCU: permanent care unit; RPU: rural planning unit.

Source: Ruiz (21).

Due to this deficiency in health infrastructures, timely access to medical care is difficult for the inhabitants and floating population that frequents the neighborhood in a daily basis, which is com-

posed of thousands of employees of public and private businesses and offices, students at private universities, and people in general that come to neighborhood to seek commercial and cultural offerings. This is even more worrying if we consider the high number of new buildings under construction in Las Nieves for housing and offices, which will increase the number of permanent residents and temporary visitors.

Means of transportation

Las Nieves, being located in the center of the city, has a massive public transportation system. In Bogotá, this type of transportation is organized through the Integrated Public Transport System (SITP for its acronym in Spanish). SITP is characterized by the use of buses of different types and colors. Blue buses provide urban service, circulating on the main roads to connect the stations of the established routes; red buses provide special service, traveling to and from the outskirts of the city. The complementary buses, of orange color, circulate only in one of the zones and their purpose is to take passengers to a pedestrian access, portal or station of the Transmilenio bus service. Finally, the articulated and bi-articulated Transmilenio buses follow different trunk lines through the city (22).

In the Las Nieves neighborhood, SITP has four Transmilenio trunk-line stations that allow mobilization in the city. Thus, there is the “Universities” station, located on 3rd Avenue between 19th and 22nd Streets. It is open to the public Monday through Friday from 4:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., on Saturdays from 5:00 a.m. to 11 p.m., and on Sundays and holidays from 5:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. The trunk services offered by this station toward the west side are K6, D70 and D95, and toward the north side, the only line is C73. For this reason, the B74 line also operates on special schedules. The lines that finish their route at the “Universities” station are J6, J24, J73, and J95; this last one works on Sundays and holidays (23,24).

Another of the trunk-line stations is “Las Aguas,” which is one of the better-known and busiest Transmilenio stations; it is located on 3rd Avenue between 18th and 19th Streets and is open Monday through Saturday from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., on Sundays from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., and it does not operate on holidays. This station has a pedestrian connection through an underground tunnel to the “Universities” station. There is a route toward the north side (B74) and one to the south (F23). The bus lines that end their route at this station are J23, J70, and J72, from Monday through Saturday (23,24).

The third trunk-line station in Las Nieves is the “San Diego” station, located on 10th Avenue between 23rd and 25th Streets; it is open Monday through Friday from 4:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., on Saturdays from 5:00 a.m. to 11 p.m., on Sundays from 5:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., and it does not operate on holidays. It has three articulated buses to the north: M51, M47, and M99. These last two are routes that operate on Sundays. The route that goes to the south is G47, and it circulates every day of the week. The routes to the west are F51 and F99; the latter operates on Sundays (23,24).

Finally, the fourth station is the one that bears the name of the neighborhood: “Las Nieves.” It is located on 10th Avenue between 17th and 19th Streets; it is open Monday through Friday from 4:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., on Saturdays from 5:00 a.m. to 11 p.m., on Sundays from 5:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. It does not operate on holidays. The “Las Nieves” station offers the same routes as the “San Diego” station, on the same days and with the same schedule (23,24).

SECOND PHASE: OBSERVATION AND TOUR OF THE LAS NIEVES NEIGHBORHOOD

Below, the infrastructures found in the neighborhood are described in general, followed by the texts generated by the researchers during the tour.

The Las Nieves neighborhood, located in the center of Bogotá, is famous for its antiquity and population, mainly artisans; it has a parish church located on 7th Avenue with 20th Street, one of the first churches built in the city. Additionally, in Las Nieves, there are different commercial and tourist sectors, as well as important universities, due to which the neighborhood has a diverse population, such as students, merchants, street vendors, and their inhabitants.

The tour began on a Sunday morning in October, and its purpose was to become familiar with the neighborhood. The tour included the now pedestrian 7th Avenue. It was decided that the meeting and starting point would be the main entrance of the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano. During the group tour, the researchers took photographs of the sites that are relevant to the neighborhood and its inhabitants, many of whom were uncomfortable and displeased by this activity. Photographs were taken with extreme caution due to the insecurity of the sector in certain areas, such as 10th Avenue.

As the walk through the neighborhood began, different buildings were observed that had a cultural significance for the population, a point of contrast between old and modern architectural structures, with a great variety of sizes, among which the BD Bacatá and 7-24 projects can be highlighted. In addition, it was evident that the Las Nieves neighborhood has a variety of tourist, entertainment, and educational sites, which are presented in table 2. In the neighborhood, there are about twenty shopping centers and more than one hundred establishments offering different types of food. In addition, there are two large libraries, one of them the National Library, which is one of the most important libraries in the country. The neighborhood also has about eleven luxury hotels at the service of tourists.

The Las Nieves neighborhood stands out for being an area that has approximately 16 universities, which makes it a place with a high flow of young university students. Currently, Las Nieves has 156

TABLA 2. List of buildings and tourist sites

PLACES	QUANTITY
Shopping centers	20
Food establishments	120
Libraries	2
Hotels	11
Universities and campuses	16
Buildings	156
Theaters and cinemas	8
Stores and markets	138

buildings, among which the Colpatría Tower—one of the highest buildings in the city—, the ETB tower and the buildings of various banks can be highlighted. With respect to entertainment sites, Las Nieves has eight establishments—theaters and cinemas—that provide a leisure space that is different from the usual occupations of the sector's inhabitants. In addition, it has more than 138 stores and markets with a significant influx of artisanal trade, since this has been one of the main activities carried out in the neighborhood throughout its history. Surprisingly, as already mentioned, no health centers or hospitals were found, which reveals the serious deficiency of this type of infrastructures in the neighborhood.

During the tour, it was evident that the inhabitants and storekeepers of the sector are characterized by being, mostly, hard-working, charismatic people, who are knowledgeable of the sector and dedicated to service and to people. Likewise, it was found that the area of 4th Avenue with 20th Street has become a hub of restaurants that offer food of the Colombian Pacific, tended by Afro-Colombians from that region, which gives a particular ethnic aspect to the sector and makes it an important point of attraction for diner guests, especially on weekends.

Perspectives of the participants during the tour

Next, the perceptions of the researchers during their tour of the neighborhood are transcribed.

Tour 1. Cindy Vanegas

“I had to take the tour on 8th Avenue, which, in general, had a solitary appearance; its main architectural structures, like most of the neighborhood’s, are houses or old passages inhabited by people who live in or around the sector. These houses have a commercial use, with stores that, for the most part, sell food from the sea, better known as fisheries. Although I do not like the smell or the handling of this type of food, I stayed there and observed great cargo movement in trucks, I suppose, to transport and distribute it in different places of the city.”

“On this block, you can also find a side or façade of the ETB building; although its sign is not very visible, it can be identified by the watermarks on the glass of one of its main entrances.”

“During the tour, I saw the church of Our Lady of Las Nieves, which is on 7th Avenue, through a kind of passage or broad corridor, which was the old market square of Las Nieves. This corridor is now ‘invaded’ by unfriendly street vendors, who are selling second-hand or used goods, which may come from thefts. Their low prices attract many buyers of different looks and social classes, which further exacerbates congestion in this corridor for passers-by. Additionally, there are other routine visitors, who come to the place to survive: pigeons and dogs that feed on debris or pieces of food thrown to the ground. Likewise, there are some old pictures or images located in the sector to recreate its past appearance, seeking to recover the urban and cultural area; they all have a logo that identifies the Mayor’s Office: ‘Bogotá Humana’.”

“The appearance of 8th Avenue is not pleasing to the senses; there is a lot of pollution in the air due to smells, the floor is dirty and there are leftovers from sea animals, in addition to the garbage people throw on the floor.”

“During the tour, I decided to take photos of the streets; as a result, the attitude of many passers-by

or store employees was angry and intrigued because they ignored the purpose of the photos. It is possible to understand this due to the instinctive distrust of human beings; after this, we met again at the university and there we shared our experiences. Subsequently, we set out to take our tour on 7th Avenue.”

Tour 2. Adriana Pérez and Carolina Gómez

“We took the tour on 3rd Avenue between 26th and 19th Streets. The appearance of the neighborhood, depending on whether you walk on the western or eastern side, can produce two different points of view: one marked by urban development with large residential buildings, which, despite their recent construction time, were under remodeling. These are surrounded by streets, which allow a rapid mobility to different areas of the city, from the most external zones to the most central ones. On the other hand, on the left side, you can see the mountains, including the hill of Monserrate, a tourist place par excellence, and the hill of Guadalupe, which has a more religious character. Likewise, we could make out a neighborhood; due to the material used in the houses and its steep location on the hill, it was thought to be of scarce resources, possibly a neighborhood of socio-economic level 2.”

“The last station of the environmental axis, called ‘Universities,’ is on this avenue, which allows the access of younger and older people to their work and study places, due to which it has a high pedestrian flow.”

Tour 3. Bibiana Sandoval

“I took a tour on 9th and 10th Avenues. The first one is of a commercial type: it offers hardware and electronic parts; it is a site frequented by students of engineering or other technological studies. It is a place full of passages with brightly colored lights, jobs with mechanical movements: it is an easy space to distinguish. Its sidewalks are busy with people looking for something or working as

street vendors of food products, such as cookies, food packets, gums, and cigarettes, which are never missing from their vending boxes. In addition, there is a few stores that sell accessories popularly known as ‘trinkets,’ quite economical and attractive, especially for women, such as earrings, headbands, elastic bands for hair, makeup, etc.”

“The tour on 10th Avenue was done by car, given that this sector is highly dangerous due to the fact that many opportunistic people with little chance of honest work pass by there. The 10th Avenue is a key site for mobilization and access to the center of the capital. On this trunk line, there is the “Las Nieves” station, quite frequented by people in general. We took photos from the car. Similar to other areas of the neighborhood, people were a little annoyed and suspicious, because we were new faces and with camera in hand. It is no secret to anyone the amount of smuggled goods and micro-trafficking of drugs that occur in this sector, which may explain the hostility of merchants and people who attend the area.”

“Among the businesses with the largest number of establishments are pawn shops, with jewelry and electronic appliances; in general, household items. This zone, due to heavy vehicular traffic, has a high level of contamination because of the smoke emitted by cars and the noise coming from their engines and horns. Its appearance is quite gray; the ground, the walls and windows of the old buildings are all covered with smut.”

Tour 4. In group

“To end the tour as a team, after sharing our individual experiences, we were ready to immerse ourselves in multiculturalism and commerce of all kinds on the pedestrian section of the 7th Avenue. We enjoyed the view of great buildings, such as the ETB building, which, as already mentioned, does not have any eye-catching identification. Similarly, we observed the old and well-known Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Theater that presents musical and theatrical works for all ages and tastes; the

Colpatría Tower, which is now not only a work place, but also a tourist attraction; and the main parish church of the Las Nieves neighborhood, which has been renovated over the years.”

“This important avenue, however, is not only pedestrian, but it also has a preferential lane for people who enjoy riding a bicycle. This makes this avenue a family-friendly space, despite being quite crowded with passers-by and people who exhibit their artistic talents, such as painting, singing, dancing, and imitation, among others, which makes even more pleasant the walk. In addition, there is a diversity of smells and foods of all kinds, sizes, prices, and ingredients, which transport the visitors to different places of the country and make their mouth water and their stomach growl, forcing them to taste the exquisite food during their visit.”

“At the end of this avenue, on 26th Street, there is an important point called the Flea Market. This market is organized in a public parking lot and it is famous for the variety of second-hand objects that are sold or exchanged there, since many of them have are quite valuable due to their antiquity and conservation status. For this reason, this place is visited not only by people with scarce resources, but also by those interested in collecting articles of great cultural value.”

“It is worth noting that the neighborhood is suitable for being a tourist attraction in the city due to the great variety of sites already mentioned; these are attractive to people due to the changes they have undergone, as well as because of their history and antiquity. As knowledgeable novices of the neighborhood, we can assure that there are many places to visit, many plans to make, and many people to know. However, persons with greater empowerment and pride in the capital are needed to help transform citizen culture.”

“In addition, we were able to observe that the neighborhood does not have public health centers in the vicinity; the inhabitants, therefore, must use mass transportation, such as Transmilenio,

SITP, and the few available bus routes, to access health services.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Territory and population are two variables that establish the conditions for the quality of life and health of the individuals that inhabit it. Thus, this research aimed to investigate, perceive, and feel the territory historically known as the Las Nieves neighborhood, in order to take a first step toward contributing to the process of understanding the social, cultural, political, and economic phenomena that have determined and continue determining today the well-being of its resident and transient inhabitants.

In this way, it was possible to identify that the present reality of Las Nieves is directly linked to its geographical location and to the decisions that have defined its social and economic activity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the neighborhood is a melting pot of races (indigenous, white, African, and even Asian), cultures and worldviews that have shaped it as an openly liberal territory. This is true even though the main building around which the neighborhood was built is a Catholic church, which gave its name to the neighborhood.

Due to its historical development, it became a recipient of migrants from different Colombian regions and foreign countries, who settled there and started business ideas—some were advanced for their time, some within the framework of legality, and others illegals. In the same way, it was a place of forbidden pleasures, disapproved by the prudish Bogotá society, which turned Las Nieves in a designated red zone. Consequently, the neighborhood was sentenced, for a long time, to ostracism and deterioration.

Today, the neighborhood emerges from that dark period with a renewed force, thanks to new infrastructures and social and economic developments that have found in this sector an ideal place, being

the entrance to the historical and political center of the city. Universities, multifamily housing complexes, financial institutions, hotels, restaurants, bars, cafes, theaters and cinemas, among others, are now betting on Las Nieves and its future. In the neighborhood, however, there are no public health infrastructures, and the private ones are rather few, which is surprising, given the large number of floating population and a lower number of residents that frequent their streets and avenues seven days a week.

Based on this research experience carried out in Las Nieves, it can be concluded that territory and population are two elements that mutually determine each other. Although, many times, history is understood as a monolith observed with distant curiosity, it is certainly nothing like that. On the contrary, present realities are best understood when the roots that link them to the past are discovered. For this reason, researchers or health workers should base their work on a deep understanding of the territory in which they develop their activities, as a first step to become familiar with the realities of the human beings they interact with. Largely, these realities are the social factors that determine their quality of life and health, or the lack thereof.

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