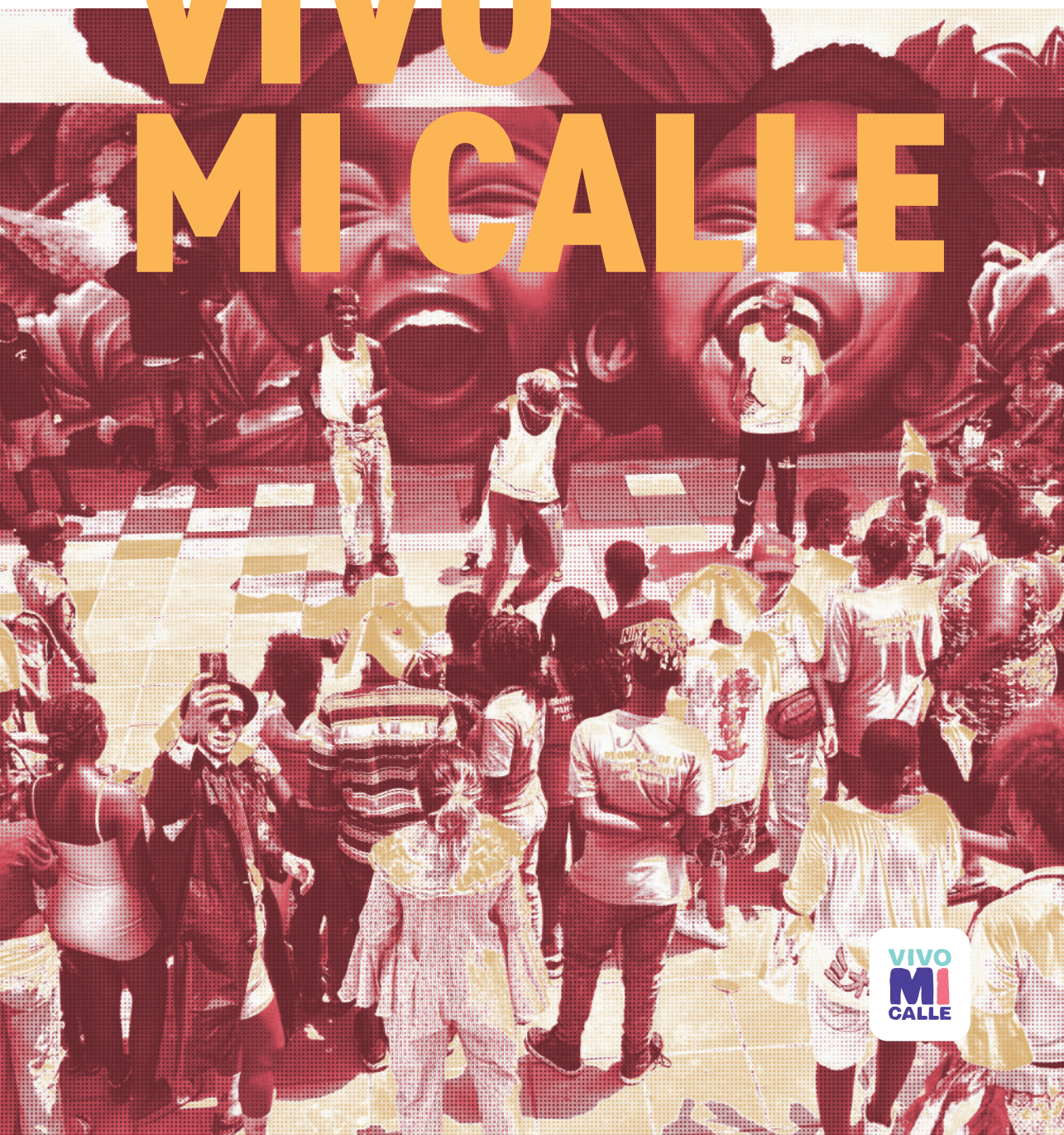


# ASÍ VIVO MI CALLE

2

(ENGLISH)









a **Fondation Botnar** initiative



WRI COLOMBIA



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Vivo Mi Calle, in its Phase I was executed by Despacio, in consortium with WRI and the Cali Mobility Secretariat, managed by ISUH (International Society for Urban Health) and financed by Fondation Botnar.



WRI COLOMBIA



Vivo Mi Calle in its Phase II is executed by Despacio in consortium with WRI Colombia and EAFIT University, managed by Ecorys and financed by Fondation Botnar.

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# FOREWORD

By **HCA-II Global Team**  
Ecorys UK

It is our pleasure to be writing the foreword to this publication, as managers for Phase II of Healthy Cities for Adolescents (HCA), a global initiative of the Swiss philanthropic organisation Fondation Botnar. HCA's vision is that adolescents thrive and fulfil their potential in cities, contributing to sustainable urban development that meets their needs today and into the future. In HCA-II (2022-26) we support consortia-led projects in six countries (Colombia and Ecuador in Latin America, Ghana and Senegal in West Africa, and India and Vietnam in Asia) that prioritise adolescent empowerment and promote systems approaches to sustainably address adolescent health and wellbeing priorities in local contexts. We focus investments in intermediary or secondary cities, rapidly expanding urban areas that present some of the most significant needs and opportunities for impact.



The HCA programme sits at the confluence of global priorities for health and wellbeing and sustainable urban development reflected in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (notably SDGs 3 and 11). It is also closely aligned to the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito in 2016, which highlights the importance of young people in urban transformation. Our portfolio demonstrates diverse initiatives that mobilise adolescents and youth —and through them, their communities— to catalyse changes that will create healthier, more inclusive cities. It also represents rich examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships at city, national and global levels to improve urban adolescent health and wellbeing, demonstrating our commitment to SDG 17 “Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”.

Colombia and the Vivo mi Calle (VMC) initiative occupy an important place in this portfolio. HCA has supported the evolution of VMC since 2019 with an initial grant to establish activities in Cali under phase I, and a second grant in 2022 under phase II to support expansion to Palmira. The long-term partnership on this initiative with its delivery consortium, led by Fundación Despacio and the World Resources Institute (WRI) Colombia, reflects our belief in its potential to drive transformation in vulnerable urban communities. We have supported the strategic development of VMC over the past three years with a focus on creating deeper and more lasting impact in the targeted communities as well as a replicable methodological approach. We have been proud to witness the creation of young leaders committed to shaping the future of their neighbourhoods and cities. We have also been greatly encouraged by the growing support and engagement in VMC by local actors in the two cities, particularly local municipalities, whose belief in and endorsement of this work is crucial to seeing it sustainably embedded.

VMC has contributed important experience and learning to the HCA-II global community, particularly with respect to engaging adolescents and communities in sometimes very challenging and insecure urban environments. Its tactical urbanism interventions have also highlighted new and creative uses of public space that can be replicated by urban practitioners far beyond the HCA programme. We hope this publication will add to the growing body of evidence attesting both to the need and opportunity for centring adolescents in the creation of healthy, vibrant and liveable cities.



Desde Vivo Mi Calle, y apoyados por e Tecnocentro Somos Pacifico, realizamos actividades y acciones con el fin de interactuar con la comunidad. Es así como organizamos una toma cultural, un foro con los candidatos a la Alcaldía de Cali y conformamos grupos comunitarios como el Comité de vecinos y los Guardias de Paz.

### JUVENTUD VIVO MI CALLE

La formación realizada desde nuestro programa Juventud Vivo Mi Calle para las adolescentes que hacían parte del Tecnocentro Somos Pacifico fue clave para que nos brindaran sus ideas para transformar al parque de La Paz.

Su formación en liderazgo, incidencia política y participación ciudadana se destaca a lo largo de este recorrido y

### DIANES RQUE

entre 8 y 14 años  
seca al

CARLOS MUÑOZ  
31 AÑOS  
LÍDER HACE 5 AÑOS

INTRODUCTION:

# HEAR(ING)

**Transforming the city through the voices,  
dreams, and actions of young people.**

**Vivo Mi Calle addresses an urgent need:  
to make cities safer and healthier for the  
youth. This book captures what happens  
when adolescents shift from being spectators  
to protagonists in public spaces.**





Vivo Mi Calle is an initiative dedicated to transforming cities through youth voices and actions. It was launched in 2019 in response to the public health, safety, and equity challenges faced by children, adolescents, and youth (CY) in Colombian cities. During its second phase (2022–2025), the project developed a dynamic, iterative methodology linking participatory urbanism, youth leadership, and political advocacy to create healthier, safer, and more accessible cities for everyone.



During this phase, Vivo Mi Calle was implemented in two communities with distinct characteristics and realities: Potrero Grande (Cali) and Caimitos (Palmira). In both cases, the project prioritized adolescent involvement in co-design processes, appropriation of public space, and participation in decisions from which they have traditionally been excluded. The interventions were designed to be catalysts for agency, identity, and life skills—essential elements for comprehensive youth development. Unlike other urban programs, Vivo Mi Calle is grounded in the belief that adolescents have a right to inhabit safe environments—to play and walk freely, and to actively participate in neighborhood planning. In contexts marked by inequality, structural violence, and low trust in institutions, this approach means recognizing young people not just as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of urban transformation.



The book documents the experiences and lessons learned during the project's second phase. Through narratives, images, testimonies, and data, it illustrates the process of implementing the Vivo Mi Calle methodology in these two Colombian cities. It also outlines strategies used to ensure long-term impact, including transferring the methodology to partner organizations, fostering youth leadership, and integrating the project into local public agendas.

This volume continues the Vivo Mi Calle publication series, which includes the *Decalogue of Healthy Cities for Adolescents*, the first volume of *Así Vivo Mi Calle*, and the methodological guide *How We Implement Vivo Mi Calle*. Together, these publications offer a replicable proposal that empowers youth and equips them with tools to influence their communities in collaboration with key stakeholders.

The current edition takes readers through the neighborhoods where the project took place, sharing the stories of those who made each intervention possible and reflecting on the challenges of promoting adolescent well-being through an urban perspective. It also demonstrates how perspectives on gender, safety, and physical activity were integrated, not as isolated issues, but as integral dimensions of urban well-being.

Ultimately, the publication addresses an urgent question: How can we transform our cities into places where young people can thrive? For Vivo Mi Calle, part of the answer lies in facilitating processes where young people are transformed from spectators to active participants. This book is a way of sharing what happens when that occurs.



# HOW VIVO MI CALLE BEGAN

**A strategy for adolescents to enhance their urban environment and well-being, with tangible impacts on public health and community cohesion.**

Cities don't always take their youngest residents into account. Vivo Mi Calle seeks to change that reality by empowering adolescents to become active leaders who imagine and transform their surroundings, improve their well-being, and strengthen their communities. A replicable, low-cost, high-impact approach with measurable results.



GP Palmira

SUD

PALESTINA

LIBERAN

CANTO

COMO

Colombian cities lack sufficient and adequately maintained public spaces<sup>1</sup>, a problem driven in part by rapid urban growth and the social and spatial inequalities that come with it. While there should ideally be over 10 m<sup>2</sup> of effective public space per inhabitant in urban environments—areas such as parks, green spaces, plazas, and squares—in cities like Cali or Bogotá, this value falls below 5 m<sup>2</sup> per inhabitant (Observatorio de Espacio Público de Bogotá, 2021; Observatorio de Espacio Público de Cali, 2023)<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, many existing spaces are not designed to be fully accessible, meaning that some populations are unable to take advantage of their benefits. This lack of accessibility makes it challenging for residents to use these spaces for community engagement, collective expression, and the exercise of citizenship.

This lack of quality public spaces disproportionately affects certain groups, particularly youth, who often lack direct channels to share their aspirations and expectations for how public spaces should be used. Young people in Colombia face various challenges, such as high unemployment—reaching 16.8% in the December 2024–February 2025 period, according to data from DANE (2025)<sup>3</sup>—and limited access to education and employment. In 2021, 27.7% of young men and women were neither working nor studying, rising to 38.1% among young women (UNFPA, 2021)<sup>4</sup>—. Youth well-being is also impacted by issues such as inadequate infrastructure to engage in leisure activities, low trust in institutions, and limited awareness of local participation mechanisms through which they could influence decision-making processes<sup>5</sup>.

In response, Vivo Mi Calle (VMC) aims to address two specific challenges: enhancing the quality of public spaces to create environments where youth can engage in activities that contribute to their well-being, and promoting youth involvement in decision-making regarding these spaces and their associated uses. First, the project recognizes that youth often struggle to find urban spaces conducive to healthy activities that help them develop and strengthen skills for community interaction, physical activity, and productive leisure. Often, public spaces where young people should be able to socialize with peers and exercise their rights as citizens are



hindered by conflicting uses related to gender, age, or inadequate physical conditions, making them unsafe for youth.

Second, the project highlights that public space interventions often reflect a limited understanding of adolescents' and youths' specific needs, such as socializing, self-expression, developing autonomy, or engaging in physical and recreational activities. This occurs because urban planning rarely incorporates youth participation and because young people themselves often lack awareness of the mechanisms available to influence such decisions.

Urban planners and decision-makers thus face the challenge of creating and maintaining appropriate spaces for youth participation, where they can understand young people's needs and ideas for creating, consolidating, and transforming public spaces. At the same time, adolescents and young people have the opportunity to strengthen their roles as active citizens, getting involved in political decisions that impact their immediate environments and advocating for spaces that allow them to engage in physical activities, connect with others, and access cultural and social services that support their personal development.

In response to these challenges, Vivo Mi Calle has established itself as a participatory initiative—both a project and a methodology—that promotes the healthy use of public space to enhance adolescents' health and well-being. By actively involving young people in the revitalization of urban areas, the initiative advocates for their right to live in healthy cities. Additionally, it contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted globally in 2015, particularly by creating inclusive, safe, and sustainable cities (SDG 11), promoting healthy living for all ages (SDG 3), and fostering partnerships among various stakeholders (SDG 17)<sup>6</sup>.



Vivo Mi Calle seeks to:

- **Strengthen adolescents' communication and leadership** skills, providing them with knowledge about healthy cities.
- **Improve public spaces through participatory processes** involving adolescents and their communities.
- **Transform adolescents into informed, influential actors** in urban planning processes related to the healthy use of public space.

The project's overarching goal is to empower adolescents and communities to better understand the challenges they face, both in their immediate environments and the city as a whole, enabling them to make informed decisions that positively impact their daily lives.

VMC began in 2019 as a joint initiative between Despacio and WRI, funded by Fondation Botnar under the Healthy Cities for Adolescents program. Initially, during phase I, the project was carried out in Cali, aiming to regenerate public spaces, create safe routes for in school zones and low-income areas, and enhance young people's leadership and communication skills.

During this first phase, from April 2019 to April 2022, the Vivo Mi Calle team engaged 468 adolescents from eastern Cali and gathered insights from 1,712 residents of Palmira—including 935 young people aged 9 to 24—to transform public spaces, increase bicycle use, and train youth on active and sustainable mobility. This process resulted in the revitalization of three public spaces: the Bridge of Colors (180 m<sup>2</sup>) and the Vivo Mi Calle Classroom (1,014 m<sup>2</sup>) in Cali, and the Healthy Route (3 km) in Palmira. These experiences generated key lessons that shaped a formal methodology, paving the way for an expanded scope<sup>7</sup> in the subsequent phase.

Consequently, VMC entered its second stage, implemented between July 2022 and July 2025 in Cali and Palmira, to address previously identified challenges within new local contexts, test the intervention model developed thus far, and scale the project's impact on city, national, and international levels. During this second phase, the project focused on adapting and structuring itself to navigate political shifts associated with changes in local administrations, and ensuring the sustainability of processes once the project's promoters were no longer present in the community. Early actions were implemented to respond to decisions by local governments and strengthen the connections between empowered youth and various community stakeholders.

The VMC team collaboratively implemented two interventions: the revitalization of **Parque de la Paz** (3,455 m<sup>2</sup>) in Commune 21 of Cali and the **Polideportivo Caimitos** (7,350 m<sup>2</sup>) in Commune 1 of Palmira. These interventions represented new iterations of the project, turning Vivo Mi Calle into an evidence-based knowledge production platform, influencing political spheres in support of young people. Furthermore, these processes promoted local cultural shifts, reinforcing adolescents' and youths' roles in producing lasting and sustainable transformations in their immediate environments.

Likewise, the insights gained during this second phase—on leadership training methods and timelines, step-by-step approaches for co-creating public space, interventions with communities, and strategies for engaging a broad range of stakeholders beyond just youth—have helped Vivo Mi Calle establish itself as a replicable methodology that can be adapted to different contexts and conditions.

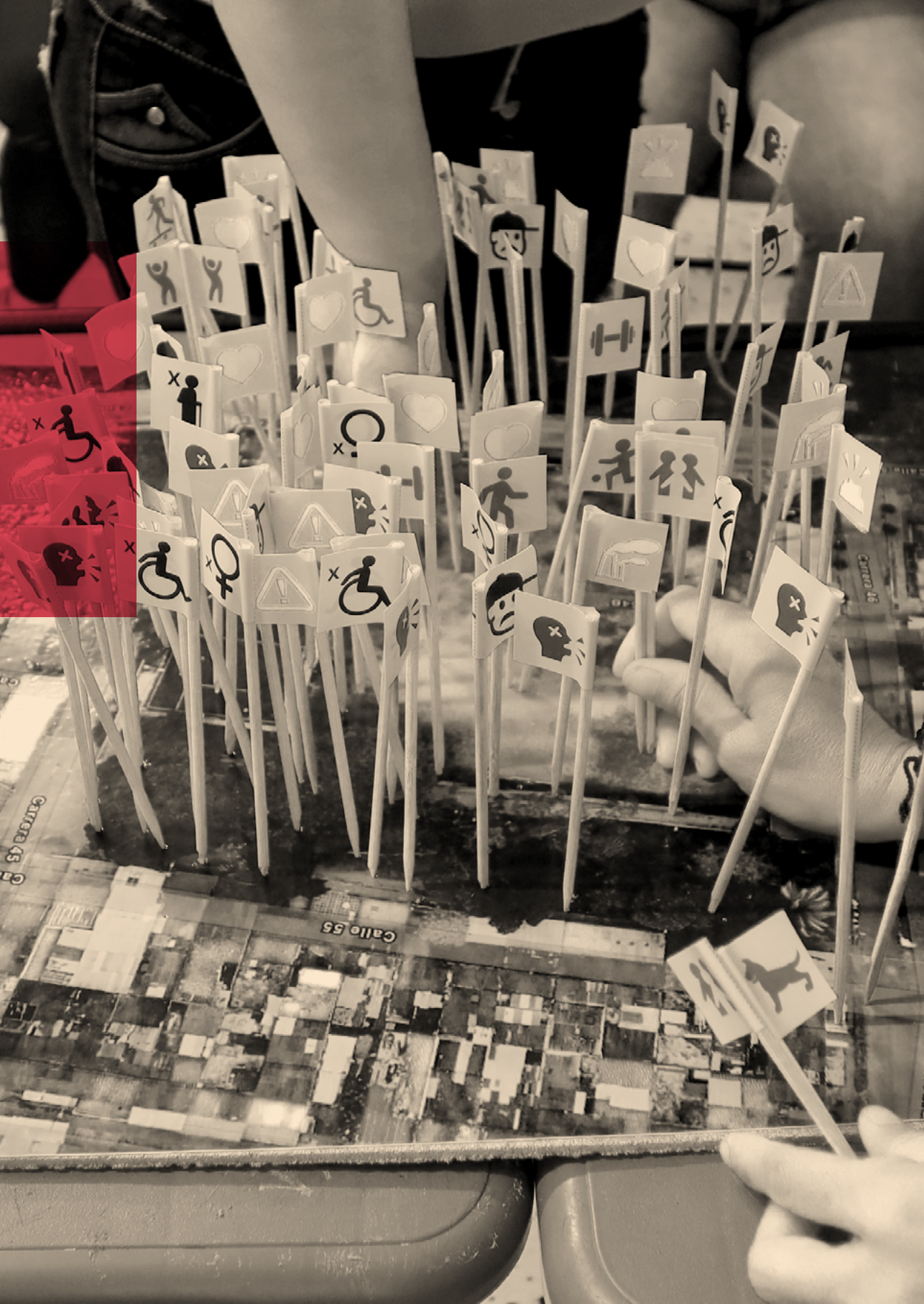


VIVO MI CALLE METHODOLOGY:

# A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL

**A proven approach, adaptable to diverse urban realities, centered on collaboration between communities, governments, and youth.**

The Vivo Mi Calle methodology combines territorial research, youth leadership training, urban intervention, and political advocacy through four participatory and progressive phases. It seeks to produce real, sustainable transformations aligned with local goals, to build lasting local capacity and with potential for replication in other territories.



The Vivo Mi Calle methodology is implemented over the course of around a year, structured into four phases that aim to identify and understand community contexts, train and empower youth and their communities, transform public spaces to promote healthy uses, and implement advocacy strategies to ensure the project's sustainability and scalability after the implementation team leaves the area.

The Vivo Mi Calle project is structured around three interrelated action lines, each implemented through four sequential phases. These action lines are designed to promote three fundamental approaches that ensure healthy and sustainable use of public spaces by adolescents and their communities:

- **Safety:** by creating accessible and secure environments.
- **Gender equity:** fostering inclusive and diverse spaces
- **Physical activity:** prioritizing physical and mental well-being through quality public spaces.



To truly understand the Vivo Mi Calle methodology, it is essential to outline each of the action lines, their expected outcomes, and the phases proposed for implementing the activities within each pillar<sup>8</sup>:

- 1. Political Advocacy and Community Mobilization:** This pillar encompasses activities designed to empower adolescents and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes. This includes mapping key stakeholders; analyzing public policies and planning instruments; implementing awareness campaigns at community, local, and national levels; creating dialogue spaces between adolescents and relevant stakeholders; and providing technical assistance to authorities. The main goal is to build strong partnerships between communities and authorities to transform public spaces and promote the right to a healthy city.
- 2. Participatory Urbanism:** This component focuses on the physical transformation of public spaces through co-design sessions involving adolescents and the adult community, activation events in revitalized areas (such as games or sports guided by community leaders or the project team directed toward local youth), and initiatives to strengthen social networks among community stakeholders (including the creation of neighborhood committees). It aims to visibly position adolescents as active participants throughout all stages of the process. Expected outcomes include improved urban infrastructure that facilitates healthy use of public space, the implementation of community-engagement activities, and the establishment of neighborhood committees with clear, defined action plans.
- 3. Leadership:** This core pillar aims to enhance adolescents' skills, talents, and potential, training them to act as change agents within their communities. Through practical tools, youth are empowered to build confidence and increase their ability to influence community and public spaces. Additionally, to raise awareness of local issues and needs, youth receive comprehensive training on topics such as healthy cities, Sustainable Development Goals, safety, and gender equity.

To effectively implement these action lines, a sequential four-phase process has been established. This process, lasting approximately 12 to 16 months, is designed to adapt to various local contexts and challenges. The proposed order and characteristics of each phase are as follows:

**Phase 1 - Preparation** (3 to 4 months): It focuses on community research and characterization activities, with the aim of establishing a detailed and solid action plan that integrates the project's three action lines and a cross-cutting communication strategy.

**Phase 2 - Understanding and Recognition** (3 to 4 months): It facilitates interaction among the three action lines, enabling the implementation team to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the local context and the needs of the target population.

**Phase 3 - Intervention and Activation** (4 to 6 months): It focuses on actions that transform public spaces to foster youth and community leadership. Additionally, it promotes the healthy use of public space through regular recreational and sports activities carried out in collaboration with community stakeholders and local institutions.

**Phase 4 - Adoption and Sustainability** (2 to 4 months): In this final phase, community empowerment is strengthened through intensive training directed toward an intergenerational group of local leaders who have actively participated in the process. This training culminates in the creation of an action plan oriented toward preserving and promoting healthy uses of the transformed public space.

It is crucial to emphasize that each activity, aligned with its corresponding phase and action line, intrinsically integrates the principles of safety, gender equity, and physical activity. This strategic integration guarantees the promotion of the healthy use of public space among adolescents and their communities.

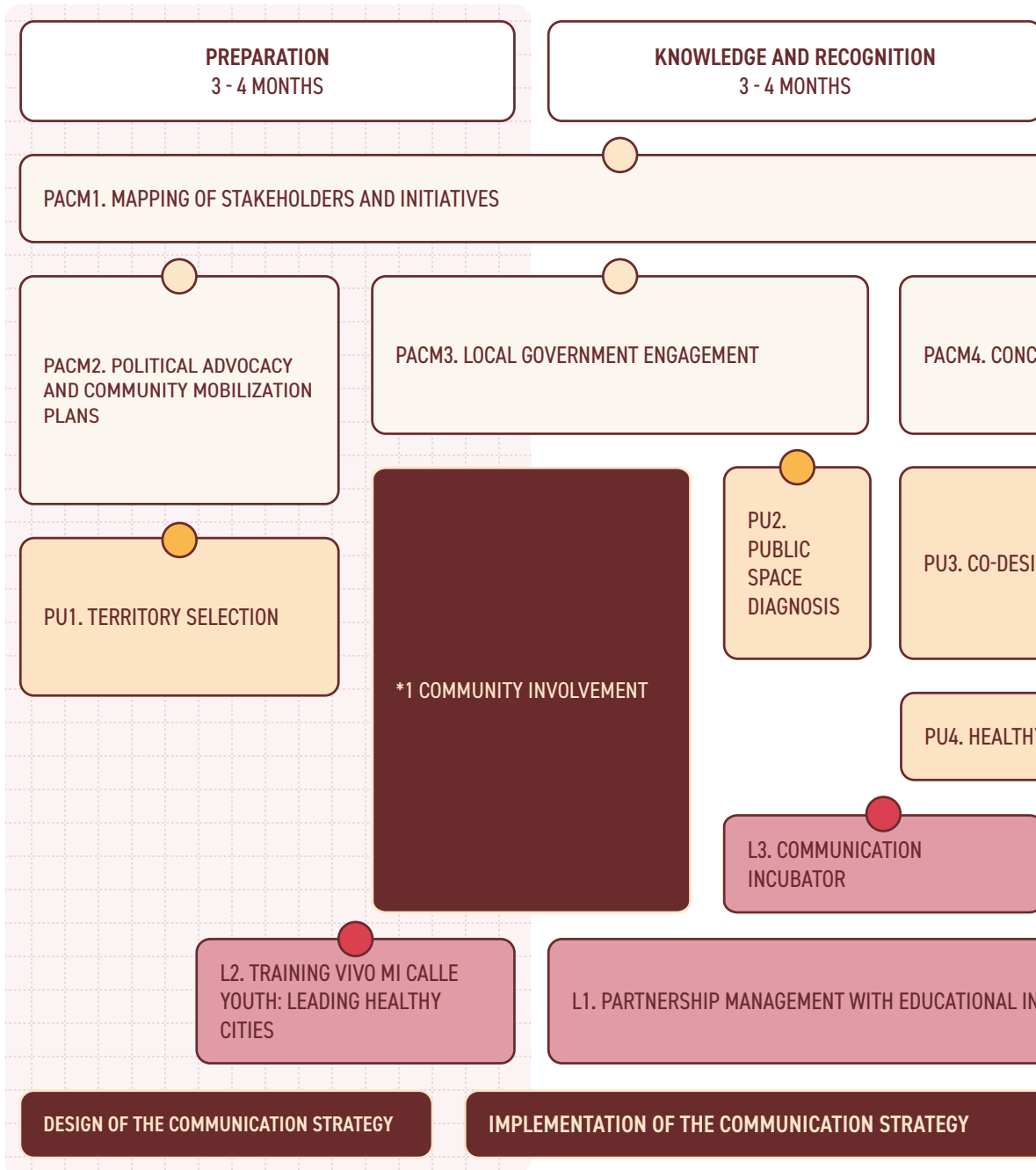
Cities where Vivo Mi Calle is implemented can be recognized as **“VMC cities”** in acknowledgement of their commitment and engagement with the project, aiming to scale up and showcase the project’s impact at the city level and demonstrating their commitment to building Healthy Cities for Adolescents.



# PROCESSES OF THE VMC METHODOLOGY.

SOURCE: VMC METHODOLOGY

Action Lines



○ Political Advocacy and Community Mobilization

● Participatory Urbanism

● Leadership

**INTERVENTION AND ACTIVATION**  
4 - 6 MONTHS

**APPROPRIATION AND SUSTAINABILITY**  
4 - 6 MONTHS

PACM5. POSITIONING YOUNG PEOPLE AS KEY STAKEHOLDERS

REPTUALIZATION AND PROMOTION OF HEALTHY CITIES

**\*3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOOTCAMP ACTION PLAN**

GN

PU5. PUBLIC SPACE REVITALIZATION

Y ACTIVATIONS

STITUTION, ORGANIZATION, OR COLLECTIVE

**\*2. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTENSIVE COURSE (BOOTCAMP) WITH VIVO MI CALLE CHAMPIONS**

# A NETWORK OF ALLIES

**A project co-created by youth, communities, local governments, and organizations that share a common goal: enhancing public spaces through everyday actions.**

This process would not be possible without collaboration of diverse stakeholders bringing together their capacities, knowledge, and commitment. In Cali and Palmira, adolescents, communities, local governments, and national and international organizations have joined forces to transform public spaces and build healthier cities, centering those who inhabit them the most.



This section outlines the roles, commitments, and concrete contributions of each partner in the network of actors driving Vivo Mi Calle. Understanding these alliances helps to grasp the project's complexity and collective strength.

VMC is part of the second phase of the Healthy Cities for Adolescents program (HCA-II), overseen by Ecorys, an international research consultancy, and funded by Fondation Botnar, which is dedicated to youth well-being. VMC is implemented by a consortium made up of Despacio, a research center focused on promoting urban quality of life, WRI Colombia, a research NGO dedicated to the sustainable management of natural resources, and EAFIT University, a private higher-education institution specializing in social sciences and management. Despacio leads and coordinates the implementation of the methodology in Cali and Palmira; WRI Colombia manages political advocacy and community mobilization; and EAFIT University oversees monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities.

In Cali, Despacio implemented leadership training for ninth graders from Nelson Garcés School in Potrero Grande, forming the "Muchachada," a group of adolescents who participated in the "Leading Healthy Cities" training. Additionally, Despacio carried out participatory urbanism activities, including a hands-on intervention in Parque de la Paz. On a local level, Tecnocentro Cultural Somos Pacífico, a recognized institutional ally in the intervention area, worked closely with VMC, significantly increasing its interactions with neighborhood residents in public spaces. The Tecnocentro also provided physical spaces for meetings between the project team, Potrero Grande residents involved in VMC, and the Muchachada. The Tecnocentro team supported the Adoption and Sustainability phase activities, including the intensive training course in community urban space management (also known as Cali's Bootcamp).

This is how we organize ourselves to implement VMC



Provides the funds



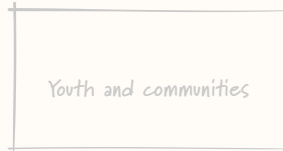
Supervision



They execute in consortium



They were local partners in the implementation in each city



Community collaboration led to the creation of a neighborhood committee that, alongside the Muchachada and other community members, identified issues in Parque de la Paz, participated in its transformation, and proposed improvements to enhance VMC's adoption and sustainability. The committee members were Norman Landázuri, Fernely Buesaco, Yamileth Zuleta, Jakeline Palacios, and Arley Murillo. Additionally, a group of 20 out-of-school children and adolescents who regularly spend time in Parque de la Paz—playing and maintaining it—were recognized as the “Guardians of Parque de la Paz”.

At the political advocacy and alliances level, WRI Colombia successfully established a relationship with Cali's Cooperation Office, which serves as the main communication channel with the local public administration as a VMC City. This collaboration helped coordinate efforts to support the implementation and sustainability of the VMC initiative in Cali. Furthermore, the Cali District Youth Council (CDJ) actively participated in the project. Notably, Angie Paola Arango, a Cali youth counselor, joined the consortium's Youth Advisory Committee, a commission guiding reflections and decisions during project development from Cali's youth perspective. Angie engaged in key adoption and sustainability phase activities, including the Bootcamp and initiatives such as “Consejo a la Calle,” which was held at Tecnocentro to discuss youth councils with neighborhood youth and members of the Muchachada.

In Palmira, Fundación Sidoc was the local implementing partner. This organization led a Leadership Training program at Antonio Lizarazo Ethno-educational Institution, where close collaboration with teacher César Bedoya and school principals facilitated ninth graders' participation in project activities. The school provided facilities for these events and committed to the adoption and sustainability of the project's interventions and the overall VMC process.

As part of community mobilization and participatory urbanism efforts for the intervention at Polideportivo Caimitos, VMC secured support from local stakeholders, including neighbors, representatives of Caimitos Community Action Board, and school adolescents, who participated in co-design sessions and discussions to shape the sports complex intervention proposal. Twenty-two representatives from these groups came together to form a multigenerational neighborhood committee tasked with supporting project development and ensuring adoption and sustainability of the public space. Other key allies involved in activation events included Fundación Sin Límites, a local organization promoting inclusion and opportunities for residents of Palmira's Commune 1.

In working with the local government, the General Secretariat of Palmira's Mayor's Office served as the main point of contact for VMC in the city. Through its "Palmira es mi casa" program, coordinated by WRI Colombia, the Secretariat provided local political support, facilitated implementation, and ensured inter-institutional collaboration with various city departments for strategic decision-making, such as site selection and technical proposals for interventions. The Secretariat also participated in discussions with the Muchachada and other key stakeholders on healthy cities.



Palmira's Municipal Youth Council has increasingly become a strategic VMC ally. Through collaboration with Valeria Malatesta, a youth representative from Palmira, the Council participated in adoption and sustainability phase activities, working alongside WRI Colombia and Cali's CDJ to strengthen capacities, exchange experiences, and propose initiatives to enhance project implementation.

Finally, at a strategic with national reach, VMC and its partner organizations have engaged in important advocacy efforts such as NiñezYa, a Colombian civil society initiative contributing to child rights compliance, and the Colombia chapter of the Cities4Children global alliance, which is dedicated to child welfare in urban areas. These networks, comprising diverse organizations, highlight the importance of taking action to promote healthy cities for adolescents nationwide. This alliance has enabled the VMC team to have an impact at the national level and to connect with various stakeholders in order to place adolescents, their connection to cities, and to public spaces at the center of the conversation.





# POTRERO GRANDE AND CAIMITOS

**Learning from one territory to another:  
the evolution and strengthening of an  
urban strategy that is transformed  
based on community experience.**

The Vivo Mi Calle project in these territories highlights how community engagement can truly improve the process. After starting in Cali, the experience gained helped improve and streamline the urban design phases in Palmira, resulting in more organized community engagement. This trip demonstrates the importance of repeating and refining our efforts to create urban solutions that truly meet people's needs and promote sustainability.





Vivo Mi Calle was first implemented in Potrero Grande (Cali) and later in Caimitos (Palmira), following an iterative process in which lessons learned from the first site guided implementation in the second. The initial intervention in Potrero Grande (2023) served as a pilot test of the proposed methodology, allowing the team to identify strengths and areas for improvement. While a participatory diagnostic process was carried out in Cali with adolescents, families, local leaders, and community institutions, the co-design phase for Parque de la Paz was approached with less depth and systematization. In this case, proposals came primarily from the project team, drawing on general input and drawings provided by adolescents, but without a rigorous application of all co-design stages.



In contrast, in Caimitos (2024), the insights from Cali were used to apply the methodology with greater rigor and depth, especially in relation to the co-design of public space. In Palmira, the intervention involved structured and active participation from adolescents, local adults, and community representatives, among others, from the initial diagnostic phase to the detailed design of the urban project. This resulted in a more robust process, aligned with concrete needs and specific expectations of the community, culminating in the comprehensive revitalization of Polideportivo Caimitos.

The iteration between both processes helped validate and enhance the Vivo Mi Calle methodology, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful and thorough co-designs to foster sustainable community ownership and ensure the relevance and effectiveness of urban interventions in vulnerable contexts.

# POTRERO GRANDE (CALI)

Potrero Grande, a neighborhood located in Commune 21 in eastern Cali, is home to approximately 11,000 people, most of them adolescents and youth between the ages of 10 and 24 (53% women, 47% men). Of its inhabitants, 33.39% identify as Black, mulatto, or Afro-Colombian, and the entire population belongs to socioeconomic stratum 1, with a high rate of vacant housing (34%)<sup>9</sup>. The neighborhood takes its name from a lagoon that disappeared in the mid-20th century, following the construction of a drainage system to relocate families who had been living along the embankment of the Cauca River. That physical transformation of the territory marked the beginning of a long-standing community effort to build a healthier, safer environment—especially for young people.

In addition to the fact that 26.8% of local youth do not attend school, residents face significant socioeconomic challenges. The neighborhood struggles with major safety issues, including gang activity, drug consumption and sales, accumulated waste, poor street lighting, and frequent conflict. According to testimonies from adolescents in Potrero Grande, these conditions deeply impact their daily experiences in public space, limiting their opportunities for recreation and mobility. Despite these difficulties, there is a strong community commitment to positive transformation, especially among adolescents who actively identify and express their needs and aspirations for public space. Their visions include areas with sports fields, community gardens, bike paths, traditional games, and greenery. The most commonly expressed wish among youth regarding public space is the creation of gathering and coexistence areas—spaces essential to strengthening the community.

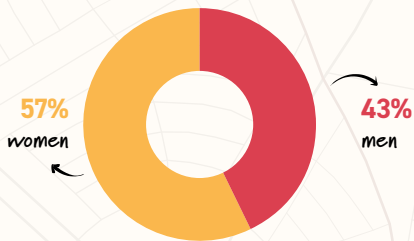
# POTRERO GRANDE<sup>10</sup>

**52**

Vivo mi Calle  
Adolescents



Between  
**13** and **17**  
Years old



Somos Pacífico Cultural Technology Center: Open primarily to children and adolescents attending dance and art classes. It is in good condition.



Potrero Grande Sports Center: Features children's playgrounds, classrooms, an event arena, green areas, trails, synthetic fields, and a running track.

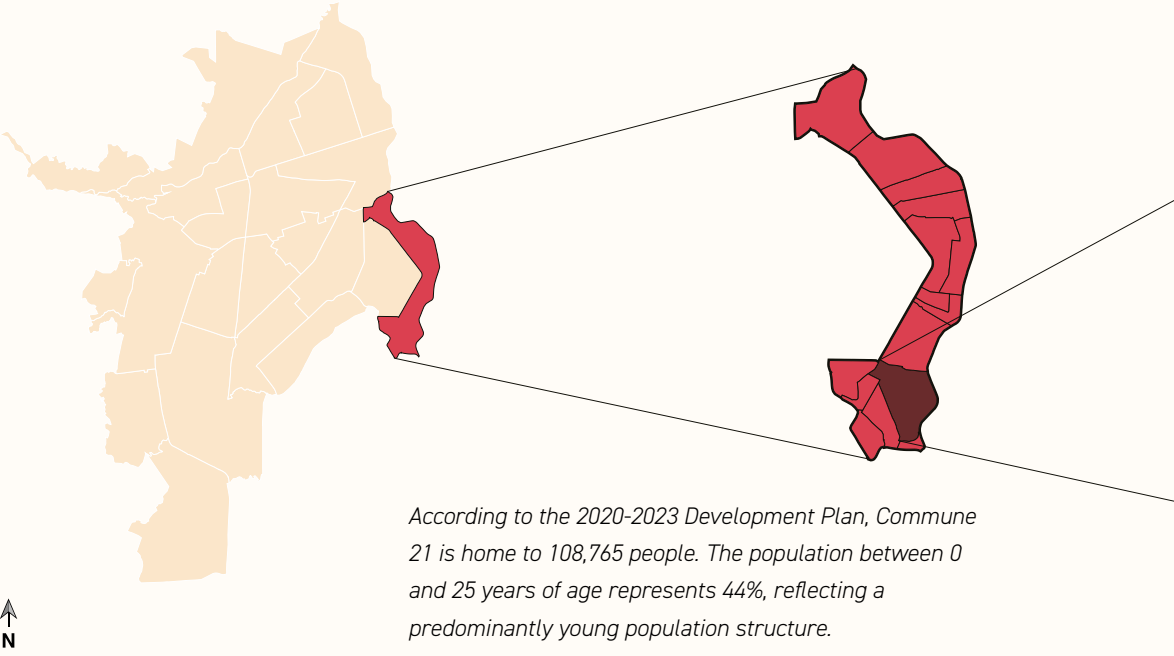


Peace Park: Transformed by VMC and recently improved by the Cali City Hall.

The neighborhood has been considered one of the most violent in Cali, with high homicide rates. The perception of insecurity limits access to and use of parks and green areas, restricting community activities. There is illicit substance use in public spaces and street fights.

## Cali

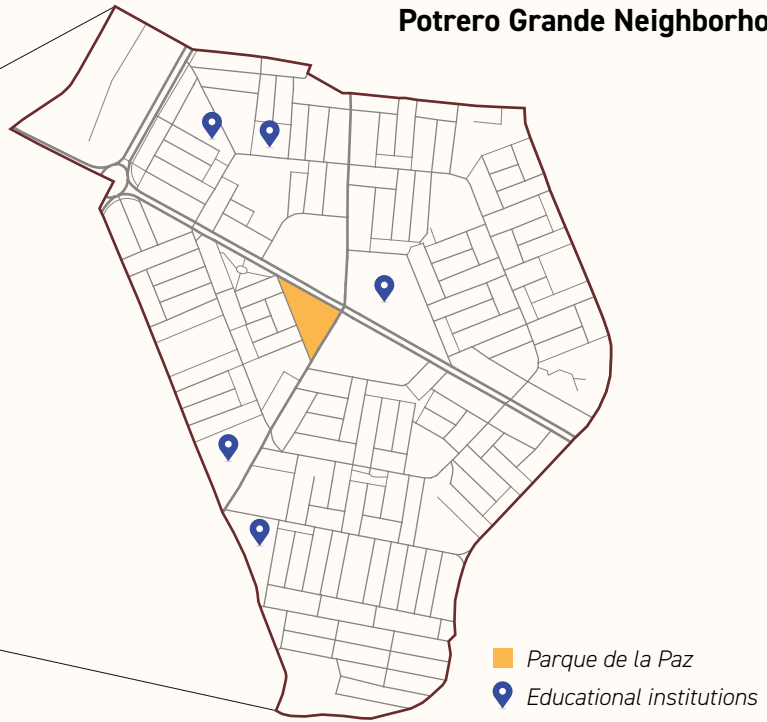
## Commune 21



*According to the 2020-2023 Development Plan, Commune 21 is home to 108,765 people. The population between 0 and 25 years of age represents 44%, reflecting a predominantly young population structure.*

The intervention in Potrero Grande was carried out in collaboration with key stakeholders who played a crucial role in facilitating the arrival and sustainability of projects like Vivo Mi Calle in the area. These included the Mayor's Office of Cali and its various departments (particularly the Secretariats of Security and Justice, and Social Welfare), local educational institutions, Community Action Boards (JAC), and various neighborhood committees. A notable example of institutional and community collaboration was the public forum with candidates for Cali's mayoral race (held on September 23, 2023), which brought issues impacting youth into the public agenda, resulting in explicit commitments to integrate them into the local development plan. This dialogue was driven by the project with support from the NiñezYa initiative and its network of partner organizations.

## Potrero Grande Neighborhood



A key local actor who made a significant difference in the neighborhood was Tecnocentro Cultural Somos Pacífico. Known locally as the “Tecno,” this institution has been the heart of Potrero Grande since 2013, and has become an essential hub for community life, as well as access to culture, technology, and artistic training. Its presence and local recognition helped foster trust and acceptance of Vivo Mi Calle, encouraging community participation in project activities. Focused on culture and expanding opportunities for youth and older adults, the Tecno had already been working on public space reactivation through USAID’s Jóvenes Resilientes program. This partnership allowed Tecnocentro and Despacio to build a strong relationship that gradually opened doors to community actors, eventually reaching Nelson Garcés Vernaza School.



The groundwork laid in the neighborhood culminated in the physical transformation of Parque de la Paz—a 3,455 m<sup>2</sup> park located in the triangle formed by Carreras 28D, 28D1, and Calle 123—which was inaugurated on January 27, 2024. The park now stands as a symbol of institutional and community collaboration: a tangible achievement rooted in continuous dialogue with local youth. It is also a reminder that physical transformation must go hand-in-hand with deep, sustained social change aimed at improving the quality of life for those who inhabit these spaces.

## Adolescents at the Center of the Process

When the team arrived in Potrero Grande, they knew they were entering a territory full of challenges—but also full of possibilities. What they didn't expect was that beyond the statistics, reports, and methodologies, they would encounter adolescents who, despite adversity, carried a spark, a strength that only needed the right space and support to emerge.

From the beginning, the team faced a complex landscape: invisible boundaries, mistrust, and daily realities marked by a lack of opportunities. However, with every visit and every conversation, cracks began to appear—spaces through which the adolescents' desire to be heard, to tell their own stories, and to rewrite them through ideas for public space revitalization, came to light. The process was as challenging as it was inspiring. It required adapting formats, being patient, and above all, listening without rushing. The adolescent groups taught the team that answers aren't always in the manuals, but in lived experiences, in the way young people relate to one another, how they invite each other to play football or share a snack on the corner. In those everyday interactions, the team found the key to building genuine relationships.



At first, only a few young people showed up to the sessions. However, little by little—through games, conversations, and shy laughter—others began to join, drawn by curiosity or invitations from their peers. It soon became clear that this project wasn't just about them, but with them. The VMC team wasn't there to teach, but to build together. This process began with raising awareness about public space, and the right to inhabit and shape it for health and well-being. The adolescents were invited to consider how experiences in public space are shaped by both age and gender. One of the team's most powerful lessons was realizing that the 52 adolescents involved were not a homogeneous group, but rather represented a diverse mix of experiences, sensitivities, and talents. The team was struck by their ability to reflect on their surroundings, to recognize injustices, and to imagine different ways of living and relating to others.

The proposed methodology evolved step by step. Participation was not always steady—some drifted away, and some new faces appeared—but every encounter added something meaningful. The core group strengthened their negotiation and communication skills, which led to moments of intense debate, occasional uncomfortable silences, but always sparked meaningful questions about daily life. The transformation was most evident in those who stayed through to the end. Adolescents who barely spoke at the beginning ended up leading activities, proposed ideas, and motivating others to attend meetings. It was exciting to see how they took ownership of their voices and their way of inhabiting the neighborhood. Every mural painted, every activity organized, became an act of affirmation and resistance to narratives that define Potrero Grande only through its problems.

By the end of two training processes, one with the Tecno's adolescent community and another with ninth graders from Nelson Garcés Vernaza School, it wasn't necessary to say much. It was enough to look at the faces of those who participated to notice the difference. These weren't dramatic external changes, but subtle and profound shifts: youth who now dared to name their dreams, who saw themselves as capable of mobilizing others, who discovered collective action as an alternative to isolation and apathy. That training made it possible for a group of adolescent representatives to speak at the event "Early Childhood, Children, and Adolescents at the Center of Cali's 2024–2027 Electoral Agenda," where they raised concerns about health, culture, and education as young residents of eastern Cali. It also allowed one of them to travel to Bath (UK) to represent his peers at the Healthy Cities for Adolescents event, where he expressed his ideas and engaged in predominantly adult-led discussions.

This project confirms that non-formal education—when rooted in trust and informed by local context—has the power to open pathways where many only see walls. Potrero Grande is no longer just a territory: it is now a collection of stories, shared learning experiences, and adolescents who, against all odds, chose to believe in a public space for everyone.

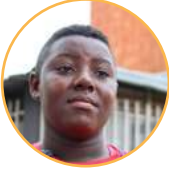


## El Parque de la Paz

It is no coincidence that a neighborhood like Potrero Grande, in eastern Cali, became the setting for a deep reflection on how urban planning and citizen participation can come together to improve people's lives. It was here that Vivo Mi Calle first implemented its methodology, specifically designed to operationalize this premise through an iterative and participatory model.

The process began with an exercise in observation and community listening to produce a participatory diagnosis. This phase involved walking the neighborhood's streets and parks alongside adolescents, adults and guardians, community leaders, and institutional representatives—all invited to examine how the built environment affected their daily well-being. During these walks, key insights emerged: adolescents pointed out routes they avoided for fear of encountering gangs; young women identified areas where they preferred not to walk alone due to harassment; and children demanded open spaces where they could run and play without fear.

These walks led to the creation of community maps that captured collective emotions: areas of fear, gathering places, preferred sites for physical and social activity. Interviews conducted by the Vivo Mi Calle team also revealed that 76% of the adolescent girls surveyed felt constant insecurity in public spaces in the neighborhood, and only 27% felt free to move around at any time of day. These findings laid the groundwork for the next phase.



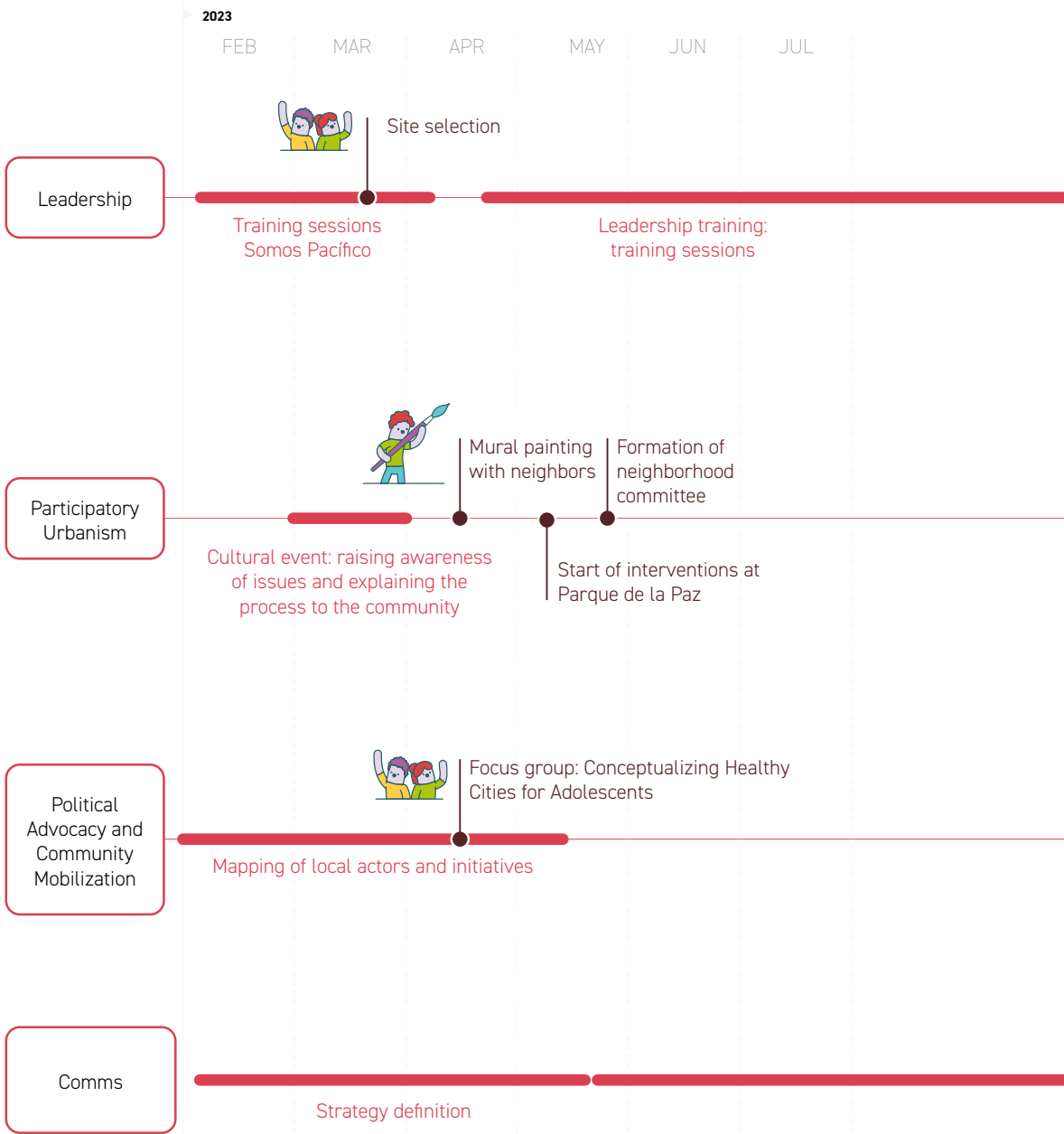
*“I imagine it to be beautiful with people who take care of it and don’t damage it. I want to play in ‘Parque de la Paz’ and tell the children to take care of it. I want to bring back the community soup kitchens, hot chocolate parties, meetings, and community talks.”*

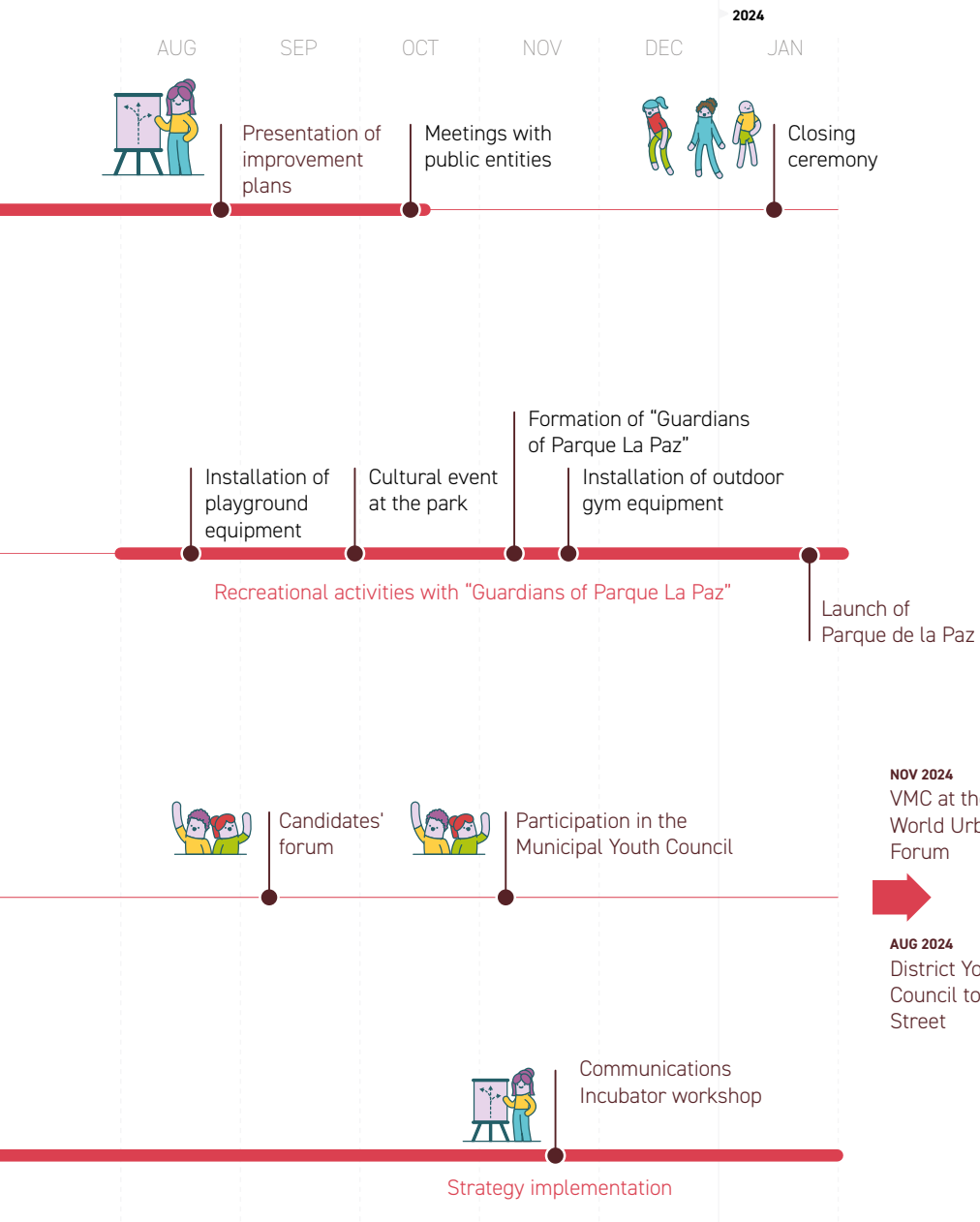
— JHON ALEXANDER, 15 YEARS OLD

Based on these insights, the project began an initial co-design phase—not simply proposing technical solutions, but creating spaces where adolescents, especially young women, could express what they wanted their places to be, how they wanted to use them, and what emotions they wanted to experience there. In group workshops held at the Tecnocentro, adolescents drew, discussed, and defined their vision for the Parque de la Paz. The proposals emphasized communal spaces for interaction, including comfortable benches, proper lighting, and spaces that invite conversation, play, and relaxation. Gender equity was key: more than 50% of participants were adolescent girls, ensuring that their perspectives and needs were central to the vision for the space.

When the physical intervention phase arrived, these ideas materialized in a park that had received little attention from the municipal government but was cherished by the community. The park sits at the heart of the neighborhood, across from the main church and health center of Potrero Grande and just steps away from Nelson Garcés Vernaza School, where many of the adolescents involved in Vivo Mi Calle study.

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION IN POTRERO GRANDE







*“I imagine it to be very beautiful because many people pass by on public transportation and will be able to see it. I want to take my family and enjoy a picnic. I want people organize dance performances and the children can go and play. I want it to be crowded and well-maintained because it’s the only park that will look beautiful and cool.”*

— LUISA FERNANDA, 15 YEARS OLD

WPC benches (a plastic-wood composite) were installed for their durability and low maintenance, inviting people to sit, talk, or rest after play. Picnic tables responded to adolescents' desire to socialize and create new daily rituals. Even the ground was adapted to include traditional games like hopscotch. Native gardens and shrubs were added, both to beautify the space and to provide thermal relief in a neighborhood dominated by cement and heat.

This renewed space was far from empty after the transformation. On the contrary, it became regularly occupied by events organized with community members who had participated in the co-design process driven by Vivo Mi Calle. Mixed-gender sports tournaments and cultural activities such as dance and music drew dozens of participants, establishing new, healthy habits for collective use of the park. In 2023 alone, more than 1,300 people participated in these activities, increasing daily park usage by 25% compared to the previous year, and transforming how the space was perceived in terms of safety.

In parallel, Vivo Mi Calle organized an intensive community training course known as the bootcamp, designed to train adolescents, local leaders, and representatives from private organizations and public entities in sustainable community management of urban space. The bootcamp, led and certified by EAFIT University, taught practical leadership, planning tools, solidarity economy, and collaborative project development. Twenty people graduated from the bootcamp in 2024.

One of the course's main objectives was to develop an action plan for the sustainability and maintenance of Parque de la Paz led by course participants. Among the initiatives supported by Vivo Mi Calle was the campaign #CeroWuireo, which responded to a specific local issue: wuireo, or street fights between youth, which had become a concerning form of youth violence in Potrero Grande and other areas of eastern Cali, such as Mojica and El Poblado II. #CeroWuireo, launched on February 20, 2025, with more than 40 participants, seeks to reduce youth violence through play and physical activity in public space, creating safer, healthier environments for young people. Other activities led by bootcamp participants and supported by Vivo Mi Calle included a pintatón, or a community mural-painting event, in collaboration with students from the Áureo youth group and the Environmental, Landscape, and Habitat class at Universidad del Cauca; a skating tournament; and aerobics classes to promote healthy public space use.

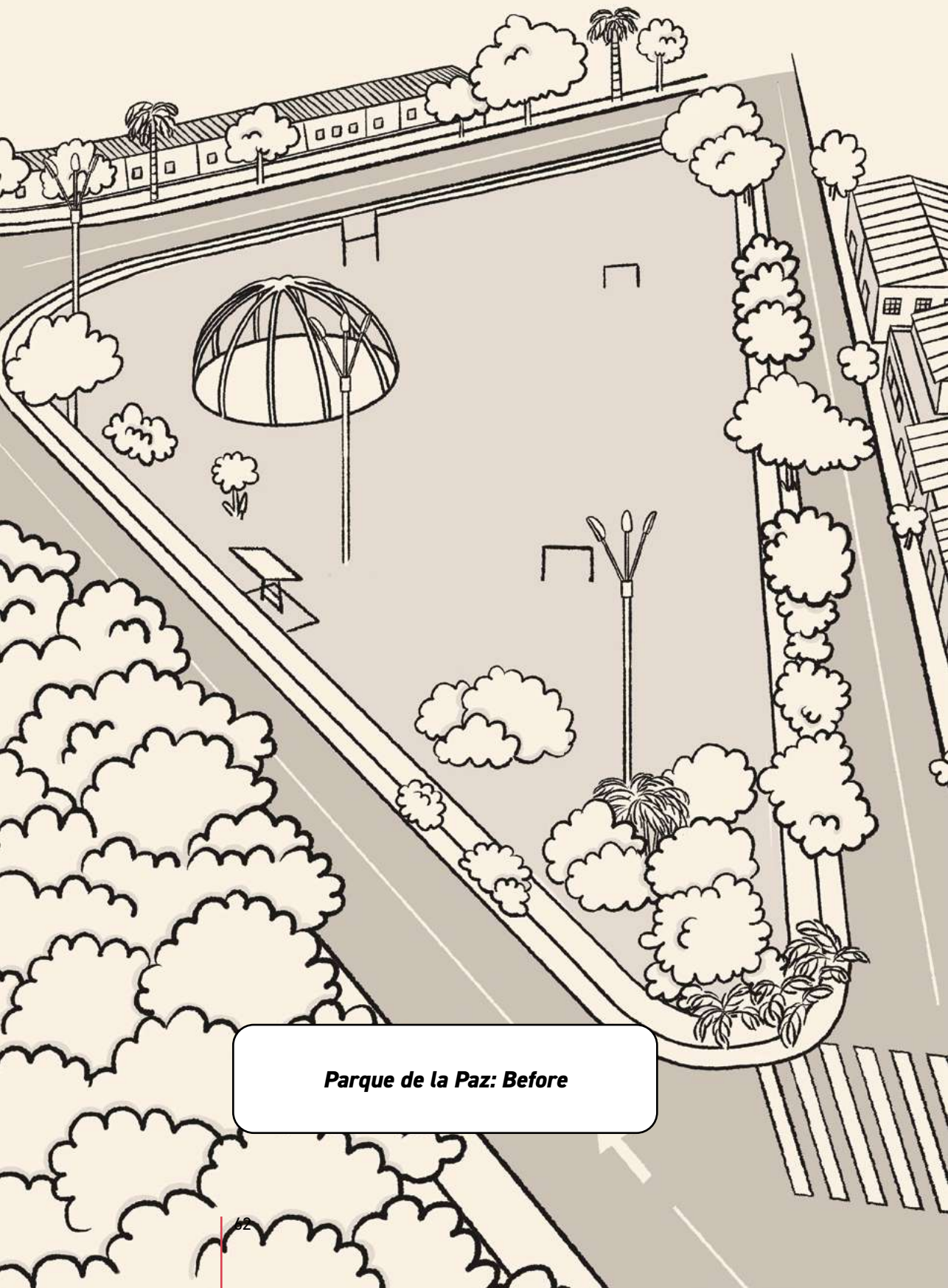


*“I think it’s really great that they’re listening to us. I never thought they’d consider me for such an important decision for my neighborhood, and that they’d also ask me what I wanted to have in the park. I feel like my opinion counts..”*

— WENDY GINET, 18 YEARS OLD

The intervention in Potrero Grande became a living testimony to how participatory urbanism not only transforms physical space, but also reshapes the emotional and social relationship a community has with its surroundings. By meaningfully involving adolescents, especially young women, in the design and use of public space, the project succeeded in creating places that truly reflect the ideal of a healthy city: safe, welcoming, and active environments that improve residents' quality of life. This first experience in Cali became a foundational step in reviewing and refining the methodology. A new, adapted process was then launched in Palmira, where the lessons learned in Potrero Grande guided new approaches to urban intervention, showing once again that every city-building process is both unique and profoundly human.





**Parque de la Paz: Before**



**Parque de la Paz: After**

# CAIMITOS (PALMIRA)

Between November 2023 and February 2025, Vivo Mi Calle began its implementation in Palmira, led by Fundación Sidoc with the support of Despacio, WRI Colombia, and EAFIT University. The objective was to strengthen environments for children and adolescents in vulnerable situations (at risk of being drawn into the dynamics of violence). This implementation promoted the healthy use and revitalization of public space through a participatory approach, using a methodology adapted from the lessons learned in the prior application in Potrero Grande (Cali, 2023) and Phase I of the Healthy Cities for Adolescents program (in the El Poblado II neighborhood of Cali, between 2019 and 2021).

During the initial preparation phase, key activities were carried out, including territorial mapping, identification of local actors, and the establishment of partnerships with Antonio Lizarazo Ethno-Educational Institution (IE). Several strategies were developed, including communications, political advocacy, and community mobilization. These efforts allowed for the creation of a solid strategic plan, the building of trust with project allies, and a deep understanding of the community. This knowledge encompassed several neighborhoods in the western area of Commune 1, their public spaces, risk factors linked to violence, opportunities related to the sociocultural conditions of the population, and the recognition of local social organizations. In addition, the needs of young people—the project's target population—were identified.

# CAIMITOS<sup>11</sup>

**28**

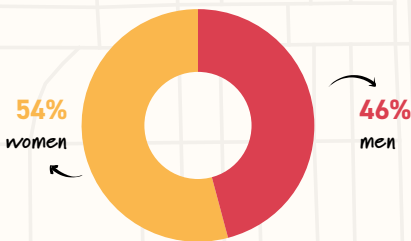
Vivo mi Calle  
Adolescents



Between

**13** and **17**

Years old



Villa del Rosario Cultural and Sports Center: Under construction by the Palmira City Hall. It will include courts, a swimming pool, and a running track.



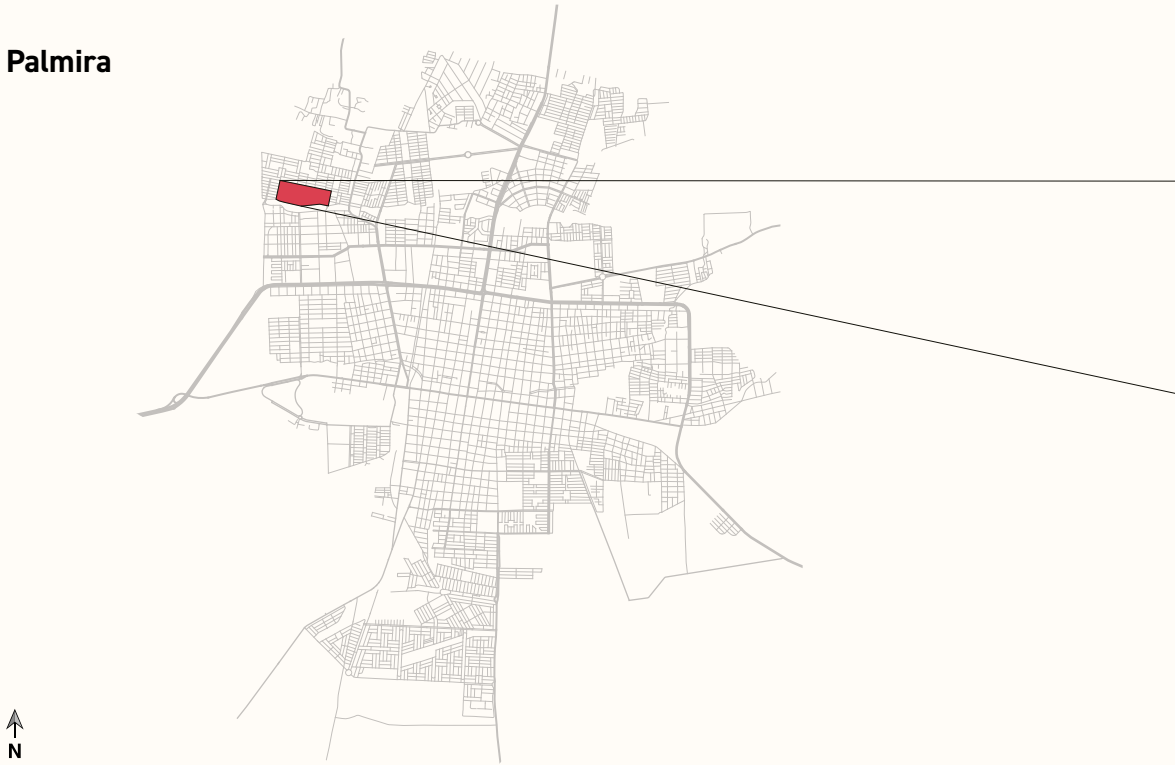
Caimitos Sports Center  
Recently transformed by VMC to promote sports and recreational activities.



Simón Bolívar Park: mainly for recreation but without spaces for sports.

The perception of insecurity limits the use of parks and green areas, restricting community activities. There is illicit substance use in public spaces and street fights.

## Palmira



To understand the context<sup>12</sup> in which the project was implemented, it is essential to consider relevant demographic, social, and physical data. According to DANE figures, Commune 1 (which includes Caimitos and is one of the 7 communes that make up Palmira) is one of the most densely populated areas in the municipality. In addition, the Territorial Framework for the Fight Against Extreme Poverty (2021) and DANE's population projections based on the 2018 census estimate that Palmira has approximately 359,549 inhabitants, of whom 52% (187,142) are women and 48% (172,407) are men. The population is heavily concentrated in the urban area, which is home to 79.7% of the residents. In terms of ethnic composition, Palmira is notably diverse, with 23,934 people (6.66% of the total population) belonging to various groups: 23,421 (6.51%) identify as Afro-Colombian, Black, or mulatto; 452 as Indigenous; 43 as Raizal; 12 as Palenquero; and 6 as members of the ROM (Roma/Gitano) community.

## Villas de Caimitos neighborhood



- *Polideportivo Caimitos*
- 📍 *Educational Institutions*

Commune 1 of Palmira—one of the areas most affected by violence, with high crime rates and distinct “invisible borders”—is home to the Caimitos neighborhood, chosen for intervention. This neighborhood, characterized by a predominantly Afro-descendant population, an increasing number of Venezuelan migrants, and a high urban density composed mainly of residential housing, faces significant challenges regarding the availability and quality of public space, as well as the vulnerability and limited social cohesion of its population. In this complex context, Vivo Mi Calle engaged a diverse group of 28 ninth-grade students from IE Antonio Lizarazo, composed of 13 boys and 15 girls—most of them Afro-descendant or mestizo, and a minority who did not identify with a specific ethnicity or nationality.

The next phase focused on strengthening the potential of the adolescents and adults in the community to identify challenges and generate participatory proposals aimed at producing meaningful change in their surroundings, with the goal of encouraging their active participation in the project. Two key processes were implemented to achieve this: the training program and the co-design of the selected public space.



## Adolescents at the Center of the Process

Youth Vivo Mi Calle – Leading Healthy Cities was the training program that empowered the 28 adolescents from IE Antonio Lizarazo. Through alternative training processes focused on the arts and newly popular sports, they explored essential concepts related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), healthy cities, and the importance of sustainable, active, and safe mobility. They also strengthened their negotiation and communication skills and learned how to develop community action plans. Over six months, four training modules were delivered in a total of 43 sessions, including 13 sessions focused specifically on the co-creation of public space, two neighborhood walks, and three educational visits to public spaces in the cities of Palmira and Cali.

The participants selected Polideportivo Caimitos—located in the heart of the neighborhood—as the intervention site, recognizing both its existing sports infrastructure and the community’s, especially young people’s, expressed need for the space. They proposed this site as a local public space suited to lead a comprehensive improvement and re-signification project. The sports facility, bordered by Carreras 43 and 44 and Calles 55 and 54A, spans 7,350 m<sup>2</sup>, and is strategically located near key institutions for the project: the main campus of IE Antonio Lizarazo (Calle 54A), the Luis Guillermo Bustamante primary school (Carrera 44), and the Community Action Board building, which also functions as a place of worship. With the school’s support, sessions were held during school hours from March to August, during which the youth co-created ideas for revitalizing this public space.



## The Starting Point

The planning and improvement of Polideportivo Caimitos were carried out through a co-design process that actively involved 22 people: adolescents from the Youth Vivo Mi Calle program, community members, representatives of the Community Action Board (JAC), and technicians from Palmira's Infrastructure Secretariat. The primary goal was to develop proposals for revitalizing public space based on the needs, aspirations, and expectations of its users, while simultaneously strengthening community ownership and a sense of belonging. To facilitate community coordination, nine project socialization meetings were held, with an average of 30 attendees. The co-design process unfolded across four sessions focused on understanding, motivation, proposal development, and idea-sharing. As an additional outcome of these collaborative sessions, a neighborhood committee was formed, composed of three JAC representatives, six neighborhood residents, and five adolescents from the program. This group was responsible for overseeing the maintenance and sustainability of the sports complex.

The proposals from this participatory design process were technically enhanced through five working sessions supported by various strategic partners. Notably, the British firm Buro Happold participated in road design and offered technical guidance on tactical interventions and road safety. Throughout this process, representatives from Fundación Sidoc, Despacio, and WRI Colombia contributed their technical expertise to shape the final rehabilitation plan for Polideportivo Caimitos. A total of 24 proposals for furniture, games, and other elements were developed based on the conclusions of co-creation and co-design sessions, and complemented by 11 urban design workshops held with different partners. The proposed interventions corresponded with three general themes: implementing measures to increase safety and usability on surrounding streets; improving the soccer and multipurpose courts to support various sports and recreational activities for the entire community; and enhancing the green areas with children's play equipment and a mix of traditional and unconventional elements.

As part of the participatory design process, a series of pilot tests were carried out for nontraditional play elements in the sports complex. These trials aimed to assess the suitability of the selected elements for the improvement and reimagining of the public space, as envisioned by the young people of Vivo Mi Calle. The process also aimed to validate diverse dynamics that encourage healthy use of the space, aligned with the project's three core focuses: safety, gender equity, and physical activity.



## The Experience of Collaborative Design

The co-design process for Polideportivo Caimitos began with a deep exploration of the area. During the first session, adolescents and adults from the neighborhood worked together to develop a participatory diagnostic that identified the specific features of the site—including its everyday use to the issues that concerned residents. This exercise, based on the Vivo Mi Calle methodology, enabled a grounded understanding of the space that would inform subsequent proposals. It concluded with the creation of what the community called their “community recipe,” a symbolic expression of their desires, expectations, and priorities for transforming the public space they shared daily.

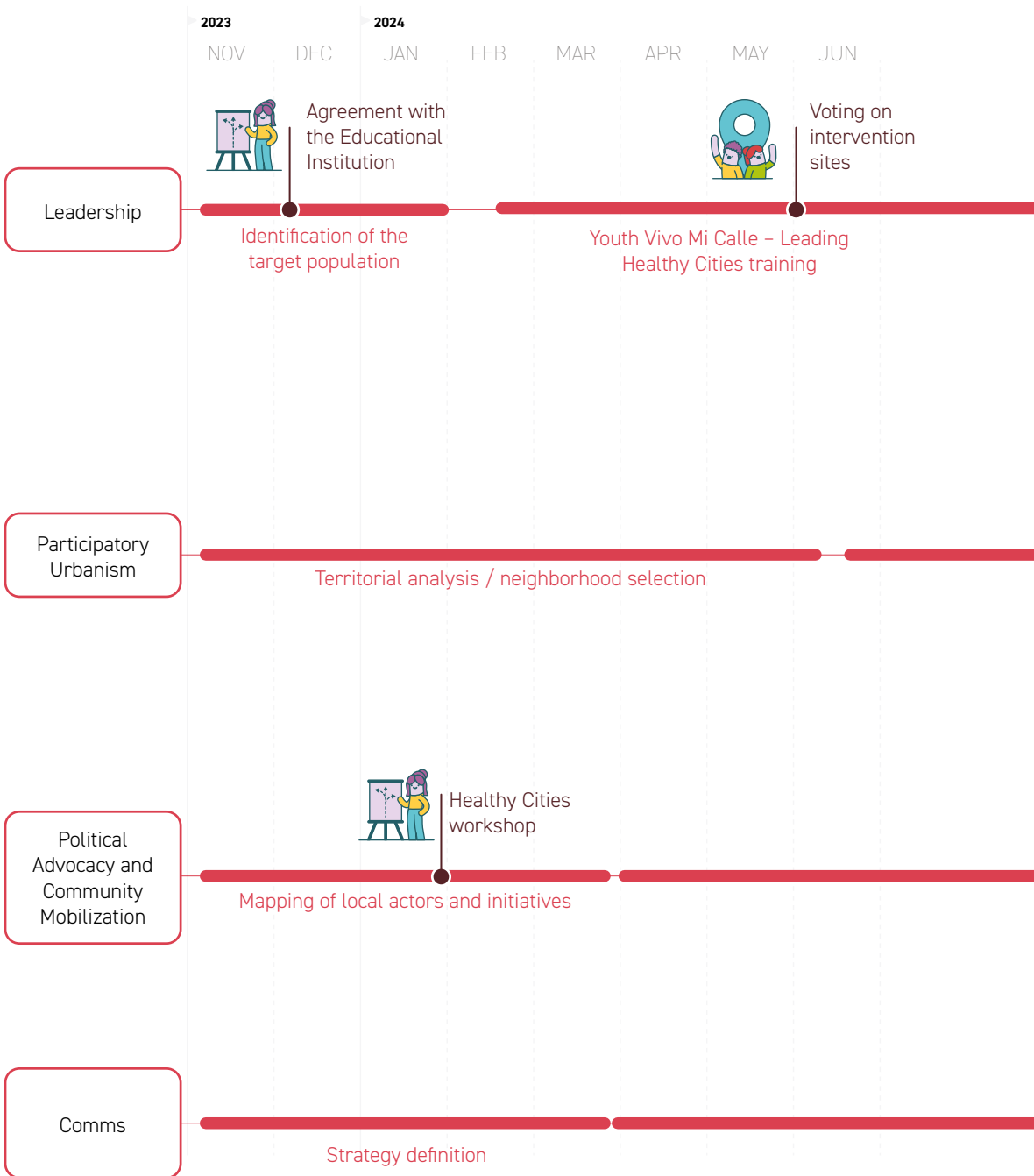
The second session invited participants to see the space from a new perspective. Using inverted periscopes, both youth and adults experienced the park from the visual height of a small child—just 95 centimeters off the ground. This sensory exercise not only revealed previously unnoticed details—a crack, a faded color, or an unwelcoming corner—but also awakened a particular sensitivity in participants and encouraged them to express ideas they normally wouldn't voice. The activity created space for proposals that recognized the diversity of the actors who used the space—children, the elderly, and more. The result was a deeper, more emotional understanding of the space they inhabited, and it became clear that revitalizing Polideportivo Caimitos would require not just practical improvements, but a thoughtful approach to color, form, and the everyday experiences of its youngest users.

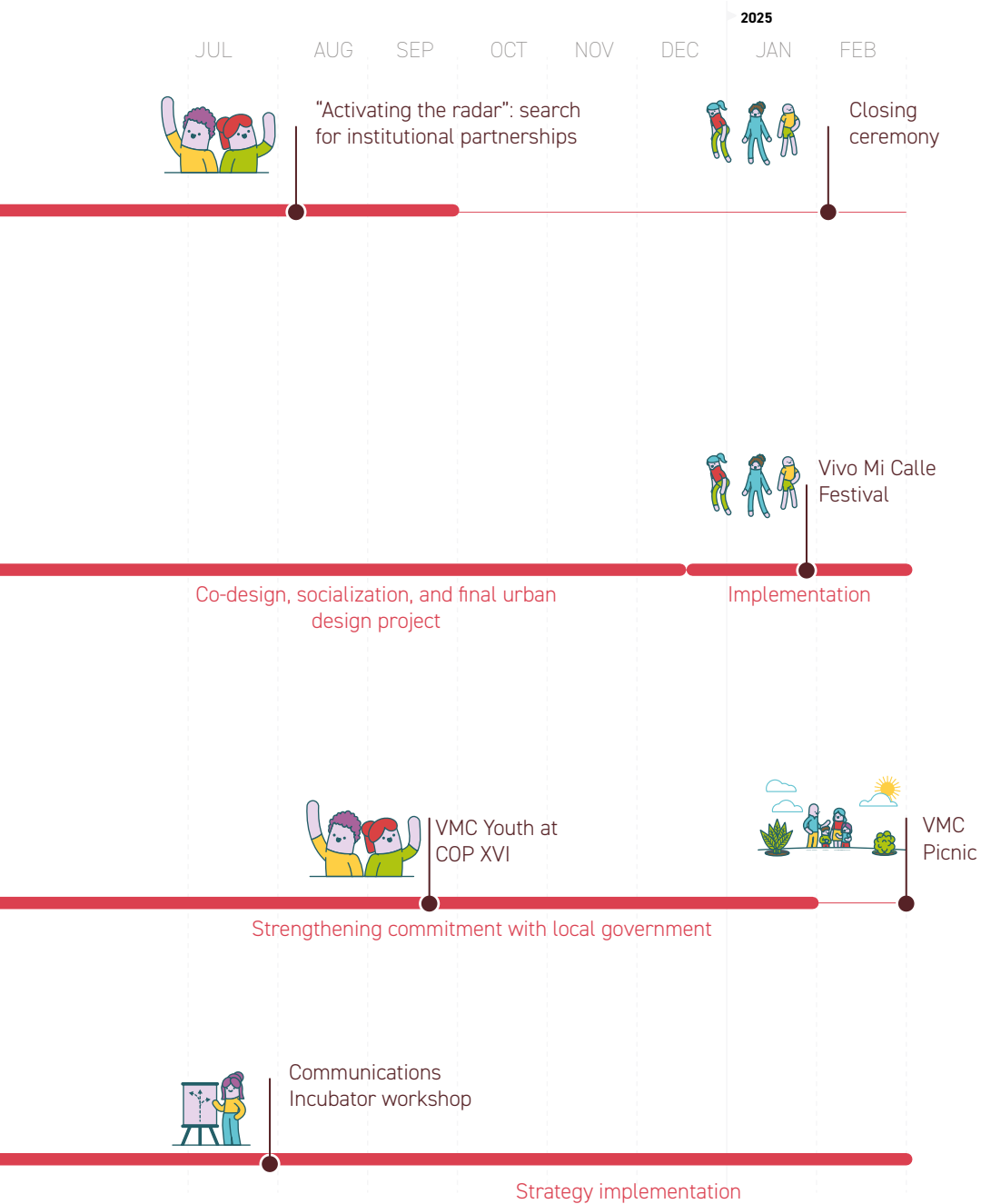
In the third session, the community had the opportunity to translate these ideas and desires into something tangible. Three-dimensional models were used, enabling young people and adults to visualize, shape, and refine their proposals collectively. Participants discussed every corner of the sports complex—from the green area for children's play and fitness stations (Zone A), to the sports courts (Zone B), to the access routes and pathways connecting the entire space (Zone C). The use of these models fostered open dialogue and created an environment conducive to shared decision-making. By the end of the session, the resulting design reflected the needs and dreams that the community had previously expressed.

Finally, it was time to review a detailed draft of the intervention resulting from the participatory design and enriched by the technical expertise of all the project's partners. Adolescents and community members were invited once again to review and validate the concrete proposals they had helped to shape. In an activity called "emotional mapping," participants expressed how they felt about each proposal for the different areas of the sports complex. Their reactions and comments were recorded to ensure that every decision truly reflected collective expectations and community needs. This session marked a key step toward community ownership of the public space, as participants saw their ideas and hopes come to life and began to develop a strong sense of responsibility and belonging for the future of the Polideportivo Caimitos.

This activity was guided by ongoing reflection on the project's actual capacity to implement changes, including financial and regulatory constraints, in order to avoid creating unrealistic expectations or causing harm to the community. It emphasized the importance of prioritizing the most representative interventions identified through the co-design process and promoted community-led management to support the long-term sustainability of the public space.

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION IN CAIMITOS







*“They allowed us to share our ideas, and one thing I really liked was that we were listened to. They never told us something couldn’t be done; they always guided us. Today we see that what we imagined has become a reality..”*

—MELANIE, 14 YEARS OLD

## Polideportivo Caimitos

Following the leadership training and co-design process, the third phase of the project was implemented, focusing on two key activities: the physical intervention and community engagement of Polideportivo Caimitos to ensure the long-term sustainability and impact of the intervention. The revitalization works, carried out between December 2024 and January 2025, involved the active participation of adolescent and community leaders from the neighborhood committee, who engaged in dialogue with residents to explain the project and jointly contributed to mural painting interventions in the space.

In parallel, from August to December 2024, a program of periodic activations was carried out to promote the active and healthy use of public space. These events also served to foster community ownership and validate the co-design proposals. The activities were supported by 17 community partners and local institutions, including IE Antonio Lizarazo, Fundación Sin Límites, the Community Action Board (JAC), Avistaves, the Samán community, Atlético Caimitos FC sports club, Reales Fútbol Club, and the “Palmira es mi casa” program from the Palmira Mayor’s Office (through which various municipal departments were engaged). In addition, private sector actors participated, such as Manuelita, Veolia, and the public lighting provider of Palmira.

Five public space engagement activities were held at the sports complex, with a total participation of approximately 500 people, generating a positive impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Committee supported these actions with defined roles and tasks, as well as leadership and initiatives driven by the community itself. The community engagement program at Polideportivo Caimitos began on August 25, coinciding with the 5th Kite Festival. About 350 people, mainly children and adolescents, took part in a full-day event that combined sports activities, traditional games, and collective cleanup of the space. It was a special occasion to strengthen the community's bond with the sports complex through environmental stewardship and shared enjoyment.

On September 22, to mark the International Day of Peace, another event was held that brought together approximately 120 attendees for recreation and sports activities. This event included dynamic circuits with new, trending games such as Parkour and Ultimate Frisbee, physical skill challenges, and the use of innovative equipment to test the proposals developed during co-design sessions. The goal was to ensure the participatory design aligned with the community's real-life expectations for using the space. On October 26, a practical session was held to evaluate the comfort and functionality of the sports complex's grass field, whose dimensions allow for sufficient space for bleachers, as outlined in the revitalization design. Approximately 75 young people and other community members, brought together in collaboration with the local sports initiatives of Atlético Caimitos FC and Reales Fútbol Club, participated in sports activities that helped fine-tune the proposed dimensions and characteristics of the new equipment.



*“The recipe I gave in the co-design was for more lighting and places to throw away trash. In the park, they threw trash everywhere, polluting the environment.”*

—DANNA, 16 AÑOS

Finally, on November 23, in coordination with IE Antonio Lizarazo, about 200 people took part in a special day dedicated to the environment. The day featured a running event, birdwatching tours, and tree identification walks in and around the sports complex. This activity aimed to raise awareness among adolescents and the broader community about the ecological importance of their immediate environment, reinforcing collective commitment to respecting and conserving urban biodiversity.

All these activities culminated in the concrete physical interventions in the space, carried out between December 2024 and January 2025, especially in Zones A and B of the sports complex. A total of 16 revitalization projects were implemented: the installation of both alternative and traditional play structures, seating and furniture designed for community enjoyment, and artistic interventions including murals and painted floors using sustainable materials. A continuous dialogue with the community was maintained to support the care and sustainability of the interventions and the public space as a whole.

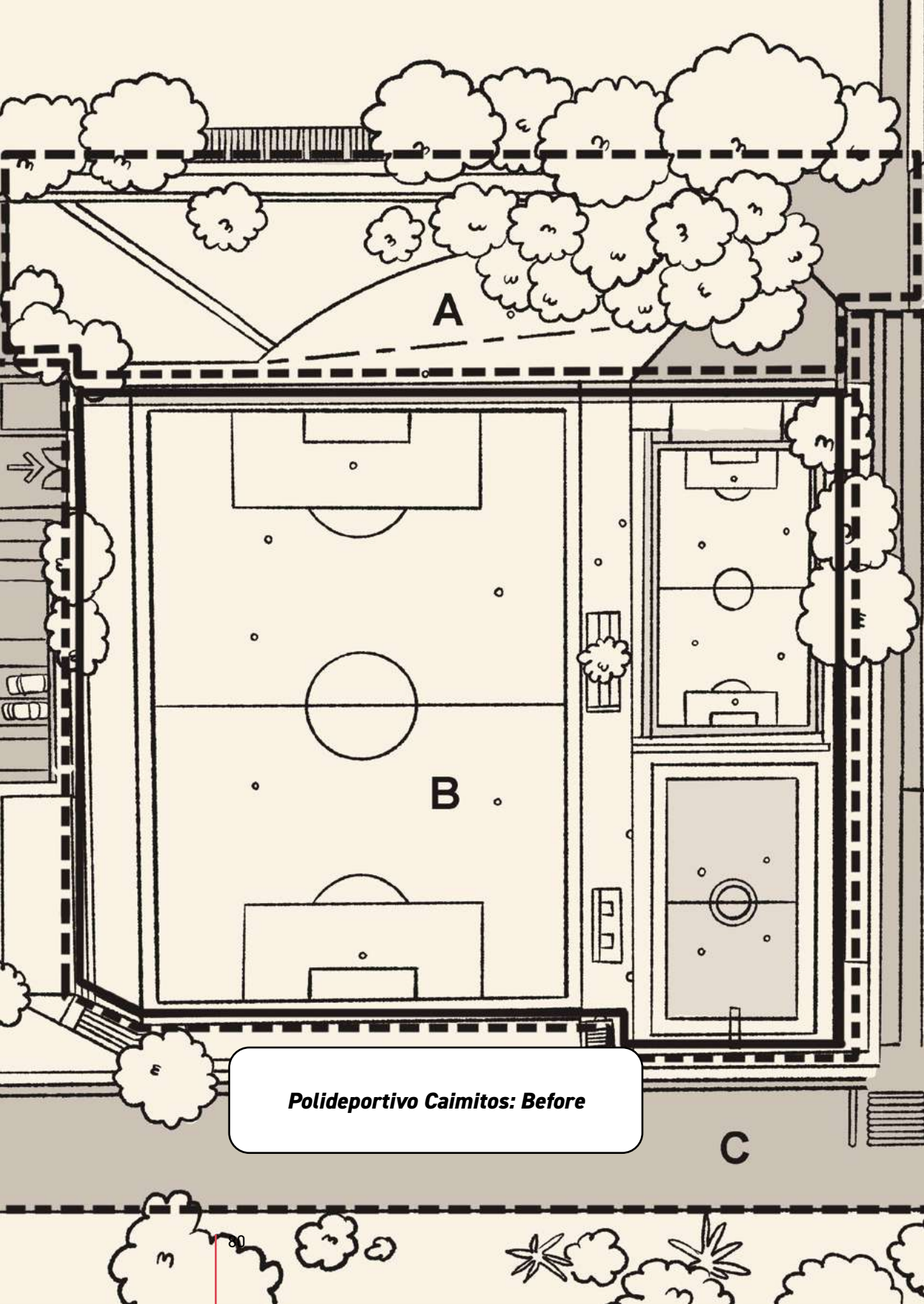
The completion of these works was celebrated with the Vivo Mi Calle Festival, an event that brought together approximately 300 community members. Held on February 1, 2025, the festival presented the outcomes of the first three phases of the methodology. The event not only marked the culmination of the revitalization process, but also showcased the transformation of Polideportivo Caimitos and promoted diverse and healthy uses of public space by donating sports and school supplies to the neighborhood committee and IE Antonio Lizarazo. In the same spirit, on February 14, 2025, the “Picnic Vivo Mi Calle Palmira” was held to mark the completion of the third phase of the project. This gathering, structured around a roundtable dialogue, brought together 40 students from IE Antonio Lizarazo (10 of whom were project participants) and five key stakeholders: a school coordinator, a JAC representative, a Municipal Youth Counselor, a representative from the mayor’s office, and the director of WRI Colombia. The main objective was to amplify the voices of adolescents and young people by placing them at the center of discussions on urban planning and public space improvement—promoting the creation of healthier cities that contribute to their overall well-being.



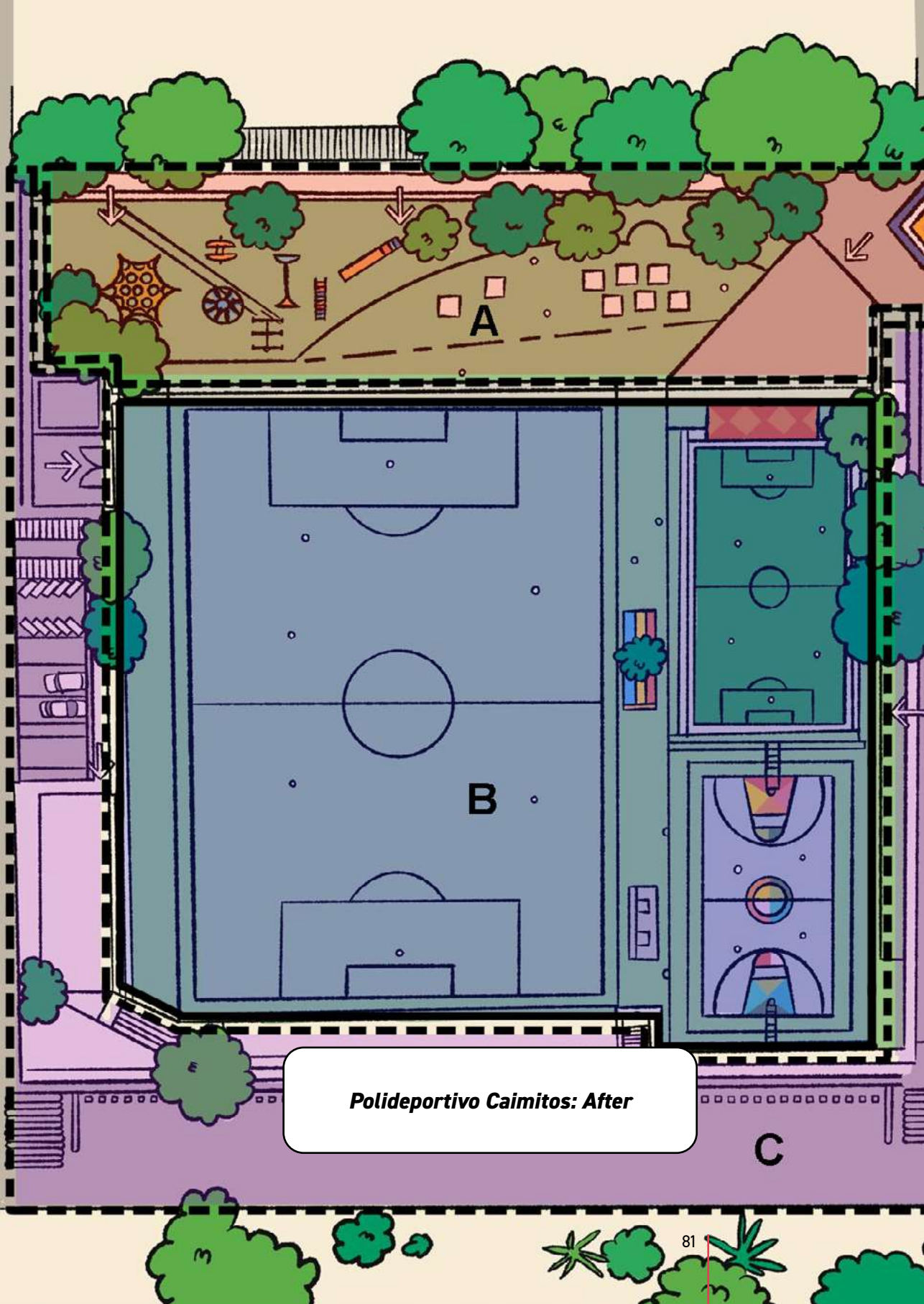
*“It was a problem because when there were games, people would crowd together on one side, which meant there was no room for playing. Now, with the benches, there’s more order and comfort for everyone.”*

—BRYAN, 17 YEARS OLD

Finally, the project entered its fourth phase: adoption and sustainability—a crucial stage focused on strengthening community empowerment. To this end, an intensive three-day training course (a bootcamp) was implemented between April 12 and May 3, 2025. The training aimed to build skills for community management of urban environments and was directed at 14 key leaders: four decision-makers from public-private entities, five representatives from local organizations, four adolescents from the Youth Vivo Mi Calle training, and one Municipal Youth Councilor (CMJ). The course focused on the collaborative formulation of an action plan to reinforce ownership and stewardship of Polideportivo Caimitos, promote community-led initiatives through the neighborhood committee, ensure institutional presence for the ongoing maintenance of the public space, and encourage collaboration with private and academic institutions. With the technical team from Vivo Mi Calle stepping back, the primary challenge lies in ensuring continuity — with youth and the community leading the way.



***Polideportivo Caimitos: Before***



**Polideportivo Caimitos: After**

# COMMUNICATION INCUBATOR

**Young people narrating the transformations  
in their neighborhoods.**

**This initiative was created to empower adolescents as active agents of change, equipping them with the tools to tell stories in their own voice. It not only enhanced their communication skills but also transformed their role within the community—from passive spectators to protagonists capable of narrating and promoting the sustainable development of their communities.**







The Vivo Mi Calle Communication Incubator was established to strengthen the communication skills of participating adolescents by combining theoretical and practical training in key areas such as communication ethics, multimedia production, and digital strategies. The core focus of this Incubator is to provide young people with the skills they need to become active agents of change—individuals who can positively influence their communities through the use of accessible media tools, particularly social media.

The initiative is implemented over the course of one month, through weekly two-hour sessions involving 8 to 12 adolescents selected based on their interest in deepening communication skills, with an emphasis on gender equity. Each group completed a baseline survey to assess their initial skill level, followed by a post-training survey to measure progress, helping to evaluate the program's impact. The incubator also encouraged youth not just to be passive media consumers, but active and critical content creators, reflecting on their environment and increasing their community engagement.



Since 2023, the Communication Incubator has become a key training space within Vivo Mi Calle, engaging adolescents from El Poblado II, Potrero Grande, and Caimitos. The methodology, designed specifically for young participants, combines theory and practice. Each session fostered critical thinking about the power of media and the importance of ethical, responsible communication—especially in relation to healthy and equitable public spaces.

The first training took place in February 2023 with adolescents from El Poblado II (in Cali), participants in the first phase of Vivo Mi Calle. It was there that the group “Power Kids” was formed, led by Alexander Flores Ocoró and Jhon Ángel Villa. This group focused on producing educational and entertaining content for their peers through platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. They also participated in a field trip to Universidad Santiago de Cali, where they learned about professional production of radio and video programs. The Communication Incubator’s impact assessment showed a significant improvement in their communication skills, especially in multimedia content creation and editing.

In November 2023, the Incubator was implemented in Potrero Grande (Cali), engaging students from Nelson Garcés School. With a hands-on approach, they were introduced to a Canvas module to develop a community journalism venture called Potrero Cuenta. The project aimed to build a local news network focused on community-oriented information, strengthening social cohesion, and addressing misinformation. Adolescents were encouraged to actively engage the community through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Substack, promoting participatory, self-managed journalism. They were also encouraged to form partnerships with community leaders, local businesses, NGOs, and public entities to ensure the venture's social and economic sustainability. Throughout the process, the group participated in hands-on activities, from interviews to the creation of audiovisual pieces that highlighted positive stories from their neighborhood—demonstrating their capacity to produce meaningful content for their community.

Finally, in August 2024, adolescents from the Antonio Lizarazo Ethno-Educational Institution in Caimitos (Palmira) actively took part in the Incubator, focusing on audiovisual production and live streaming. During the inauguration of the Polideportivo Caimitos, these youth led a Facebook Live broadcast showcasing the neighborhood's transformation in real time. As part of their training, a field trip was organized to Universidad del Valle in Cali, where they visited the School of Social Communication and had the opportunity to learn how professional radio content is produced. This activity strengthened their technical and storytelling skills, empowering them to positively represent their community to a broader audience.

The impact of the Communication Incubator has sought to transcend individual learning and contribute directly to youth leadership and participatory urbanism—amplifying young voices in community decision-making. By positioning adolescents as active content creators, the initiative has worked to foster critical, engaged citizenship focused on community transformation.



# BUILDING WITH YOUTH

**A methodology with impact.  
A call to replicate it.**

What began as a participatory process became a model that proves how collective design improves lives. Today, we invite more cities to make it their own—amplifying youth voices and transforming public space through community commitment.



Two teenagers walk into the newly renovated park. It's still early, and the sunlight filters through the trees, casting shadows across the new benches and the painted games on the ground. They pause at the entrance, surprised to recognize elements they had imagined months earlier in participatory workshops where they were asked what they wanted. Their eyes scan every corner of the space, realizing how their ideas became real, how their dreams transformed a place they used to avoid into one they're now excited to visit.

As they move further into the park, they feel that the space belongs to them—not just because they helped design it, but because it reflects their needs and desires: benches for conversation, lighting that makes them feel safe after dark, games and sports areas to enjoy with friends. This feeling could be replicated in Medellín, in Santa Marta, or in smaller cities like Vives, Dosquebradas, or Villa María. Because the size of the city or the complexity of its context doesn't matter: when youth are heard and actively participate in creating and transforming public spaces, our cities become healthier, safer, and more equitable.

How we plan, design, and inhabit our urban spaces speaks volumes about who we are and what we prioritize as a society. The experiences of Vivo Mi Calle in Cali and Palmira make that clear: when young people have a voice and are consulted in public space transformations, our cities can become environments where well-being, equity, and safety are priorities..



What happened in Potrero Grande (Cali) and Caimitos (Palmira) wasn't just a series of urban interventions. It was, above all else, an opportunity to redefine the role of young people in shaping their communities. Teenage girls, in particular, demonstrated a strong ability to identify the elements that affect their well-being. For example, these young women taught us how good design and adequate lighting can determine whether a park becomes a gathering place or one they avoid for fear of harassment. Mixed-gender youth groups revealed that playful elements like traditional games, comfortable benches, or green areas are not just decorative: they are essential features that can truly improve quality of life.

These lessons emerged directly from dialogue and genuine participation. Thanks to this approach, we now have evidence showing the value of participatory processes that are respectful of community needs. This would not have been possible without a solid methodological model—one that combined prior research, community dialogue, co-design, physical intervention, and sustained strategies for engagement and community ownership.

Now, the challenge is to bring this experience to more cities, more neighborhoods, and more communities. To implement *Vivo Mi Calle* is to commit to youth well-being and to integrate their voices into every possible phase of urban development. Local and national authorities now have a powerful tool in this project and its methodology—a way to turn public policy into concrete action, grounded in real evidence and lived experience, to ensure healthier and more inclusive cities.

The final call, therefore, is to adopt this perspective as your own. We invite educational institutions, local governments, community organizations, and private companies to take ownership of this strategy and actively use it in urban planning. We also invite adolescents to recognize themselves as essential protagonists in the development of their cities and to take an active role in decision-making processes concerning the spaces they inhabit. Only then can we collectively build urban environments that reflect our deepest values: equity, safety, inclusion, and well-being for all.

The time has come to transform our cities from the heart of those who live in them. The path is clear—now it's time to walk it together.



# NOTES

1. Quantitative and qualitative deficit of effective public space.
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4. United Nations Population Fund-UNFPA. (2021). Análisis de la situación de la juventud en Colombia. <https://colombia.unfpa.org/es/publications/infografia-juventud-colombia-2021>
5. Data compiled from infographics of the survey “Voces Resilientes: Juventudes, Realidades y Territorios,” a collaboration between the USAID Jóvenes Resilientes Program, ACIDI/VOCA, and Observatorio de Juventud de Universidad Javeriana, conducted in 30 municipalities with 5,465 youth respondents. Available at: <https://observatoriojuventud.javeriana.edu.co/encuesta-voces-resilientes/resultados-municipales#infografias>
6. For more information on the Sustainable Development Goals, visit: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible/>
7. Despacio. (2022). *Así Vivo Mi Calle*. Despacio. <https://despacio.org/portfolio/asi-vivo-mi-calle>
8. The information included in this section corresponds with the action lines and implementation phases from the *Cómo Hacemos Vivo Mi Calle* methodological guide, which has more detail on the proposed activities of each action line and their implementation throughout the four phases, as well as additional material for those interested in implementing VMC in other contexts. For more information on the methodology, see: Despacio. (2025). *Cómo hacemos Vivo Mi Calle: Guía metodológica*. Despacio. <https://despacio.org/portfolio/como-hacemos-vivo-mi-calle-guia-metodologica/>
9. Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), 2018.
10. Information collected from secondary sources, such as data from the 2018 National Population and Housing Census, SISBEN records, and results of the academic article “From ‘invaders’ to urbanized population: symbolic confinement of the inhabitants of Potrero Grande in Cali, Colombia,” published in the journal *Redalyc*
11. Information obtained from a population characterization developed by the SIDOC Foundation within the framework of this project, carried out in February 2024. This characterization was based on participatory exercises and surveys carried out on 30 9th grade students at the Antonio Lizarazo IE, with the aim of understanding the perceptions, dynamics and challenges of the urban environment of youth in the Caimitos neighborhood and surrounding areas of Commune 1.
12. The information and data provided about the context are part of a participatory diagnostic and implementation process of the Vivo Mi Calle project, led by Fundación Sidoc in the municipality of Palmira.