



SITE PROFILE REPORT:

# Cuenca, Ecuador



## Acknowledgements

This document is a product of the partnership between Arup and the Bernard van Leer Foundation as part of the project "Proximity of Care - Designing for Early Childhood in Vulnerable Urban Context", with the collaboration of Huasipichanga for the work undertaken in Cuenca, Ecuador.

## ARUP

Arup is an independent multi-disciplinary firm with more than 14,000 specialists working across every aspect of today's built environment. Our mission to Shape a Better World is driven by our commitment to make a real difference, stretch the boundaries of what is possible, help our partners solve their most complex challenges and achieve socially valuable outcomes. The Arup International Development group partners with organisations operating in the humanitarian and development sector, to contribute to safer, more resilient and inclusive communities and urban settings in emerging economies and fragile contexts around the globe.



**URBAN95**

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is an independent foundation working worldwide to inspire and inform large-scale action to improve the health and well-being of babies, toddlers, and the people who care for them. The Urban95 Initiative aims to improve, through urban planning, policy, and design, the way babies, toddlers, and the people who care for them live, play, interact with and travel through cities. It asks a bold but simple question: "If you could experience the city from 95cm - the height of a 3-year-old - what would you change?"



Huasipichanga is a trans-disciplinary consulting team that aims to create sustainable and inclusive cities through participatory and co-creation processes. Huasipichanga seeks to empower citizens to reclaim urban spaces and motivate the progressive development of inclusive societies by supporting people in identifying their identity and local strengths.

Huasipichanga focuses on developing inclusive cities because the team is convinced that the best way to guarantee opportunities for all is by taking into account the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This section describes the content of this document, including a brief introduction of the Proximity of Care Approach and a quick explanation of the assessed location.



## 1.1 The Proximity of Care Approach

**The Proximity of Care Approach was developed to better understand the relationship between the built environment and early childhood development in vulnerable urban contexts, whose interdependencies are not always fully appreciated and addressed.**

It is a tool that provides a structured, granular and holistic approach to assess how various urban systems relate to a child's developmental needs in a given context; and to help support, prioritise and design child- and family friendly interventions. The framework is also intended as a tool for ongoing outcome assessment, to measure the long-term impact of specific interventions.

### **Dimension: Health**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a healthy and enriching environment for optimal early childhood development, examining how to improve physical, mental, and emotional health and support cognitive development among young children, their caregivers, and pregnant women.

### **Dimension: Protection**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a safe and secure environment for optimal early childhood development, determining how to reduce risks, mitigate hazards and increase safety for children, and improve caregivers' perception and experience of safety and security.

The Approach considers four primary Dimensions foundational to optimal early childhood development: Health, Protection, Stimulation and Support. Each dimension is assessed against a range of key factor areas, which are both hard and soft assets – physical space and infrastructure, human interactions and behaviours, economic, policy and planning elements, that individually and collectively contribute to enable optimal early childhood development in a given urban context.

To gain a holistic understanding of the needs and demands of young children, their caregivers, and pregnant women in their settlement, these factor areas are assessed at different urban scales of human interactions– the Household, Neighbourhood and City levels, whose boundaries are highly context-dependent

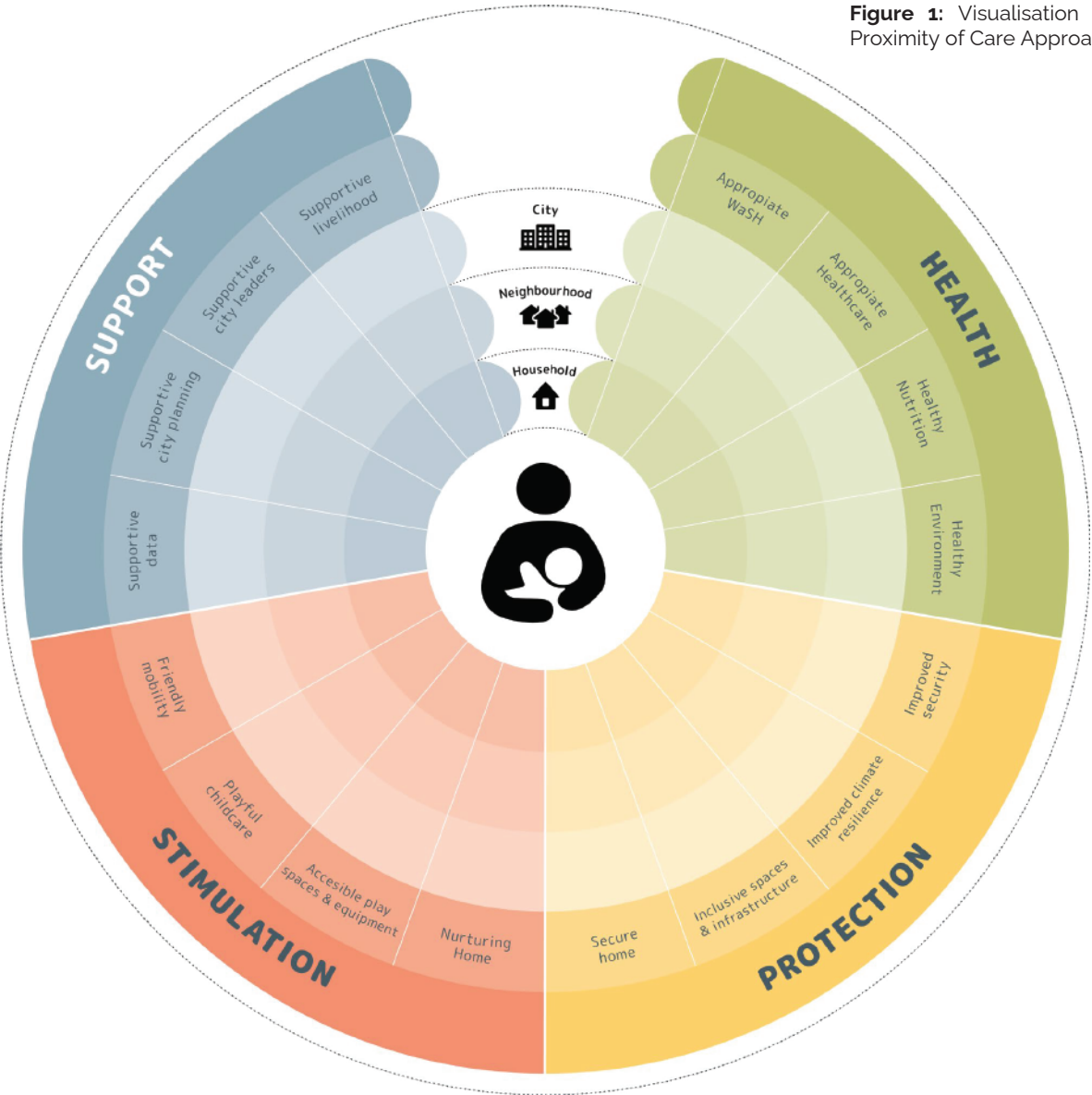
### **Dimension: Stimulation**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a nurturing and stimulating environment for optimal early childhood development, addressing how to enhance the quality of children's interaction with caregivers, peers, other adults, and the physical space around them.

### **Dimension: Support**

This dimension considers those factors that contribute to a knowledgeable and supportive environment for optimal early childhood development, looking at how to enhance knowledge, support from city authorities and community members, and include beneficiaries' voices in decision-making and planning.

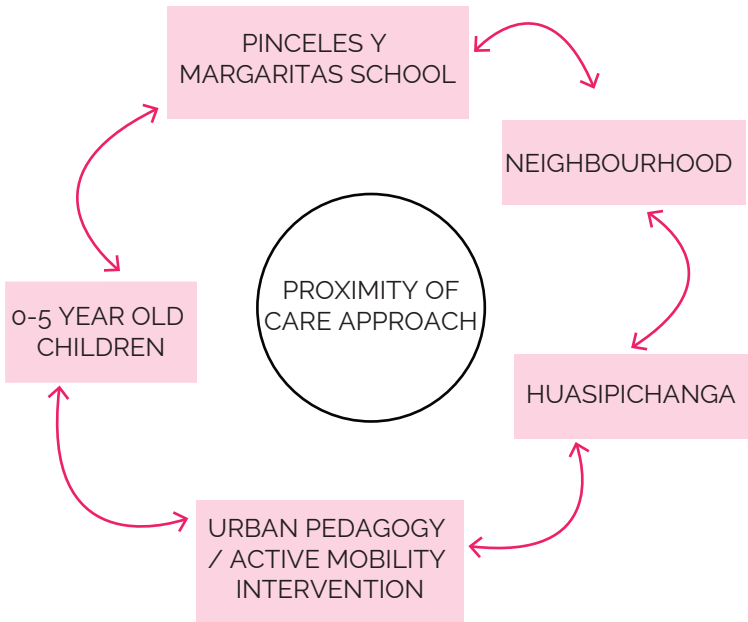
**Figure 1:** Visualisation of the Proximity of Care Approach.



## 1.2 The location

The assessed location was selected based on where Huasipichanga has implemented, in the past few years, the Tú También Construyes Cuenca project. This project is an urban pedagogy and active mobility initiative, where children learn about urban concepts, identify problems around their schools and propose and implement solutions with the community.

This is why the selected location is the Totoracochoa and Monay neighbourhood, where the Pinceles y Margaritas school is located. For more details about the location, please see Section 2.



## 2 Cuenca, Ecuador profile

This section describes the methodology used to develop this assessment report. The methodology used to collect data and information is a combination between the participatory methodology developed by Hausipichanga and the Proximity of Care Approach, by ARUP and the Bernard van Leer Foundation.



## 2.1 Methodology - Huasipichanga

The participatory methodology developed by Huasipichanga has been tested throughout the years in various locations in South America and Europe.

### Steps

**SCREENING** - Fieldwork to understand the context, identify challenges, social dynamics and community organization. It is important to have a clear knowledge of the context and socio-spatial dynamics happening in the area to have a preliminary idea and assumption of what could be the causes of the local challenges. For these purposes, desk research and fieldwork are crucial. This phase is also commonly used to start networking and creating connections with the stakeholders, in particular, the local users and community. Building trust between the team and the locals is also highly meaningful toward the well-progress of the Screening phase and the upcoming steps.

**PICTURING** - Local people is invited to participate and picture possible solutions and outcomes to co-design a proposal. The discussions started during the fieldwork now take a more concrete value by examining in-depth the local challenges. This phase sees the core team working with each stakeholders' groups separately, to understand which are their needs and the willingness to collaborate.

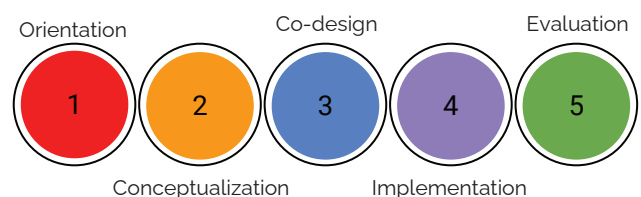
**ZOOMING IN** - Activities to validate the proposal and co-create a strategy for action are prepared. The third phase marks the beginning of the co-creative process since the proposal needs to be validated and improved by each group of stakeholders. To boost imagination, a series of playful activities and innovative tools are adopted. The performed actions are tailored according to each stakeholder - for instance, games and playful activities for the youth, and collaborative cooking, or dining for the adults.

**CAPTURING** - The team takes action by executing the proposal as planned. Now it is time to collect all the physical energies to

build-up the design. Children play a very important role as they are always the most curious citizens, willing to take action.

**REVEALING** - The team inaugurate the project, celebrating the results together with the community. HUASIPICHA! This step identifies the most famous core value of Huasipichanga. Celebrating achievements is vital for individuals, likewise for a community. The celebration must have the feature that best represents the local community. The pachanga (celebration) is not only very fun, but it symbolizes the moment of the commitment of all the stakeholders, now united as one owner of the space.

**ZOOMING OUT** - Evaluation. The results, outcomes, and process of the project are evaluated with specific indicators to understand the impact on the stakeholders. It is crucial to keep a strong connection with some local users to keep an active eye on the progress and changes through time of the project. Finally, strategies are generated to communicate the results and outcomes such as publications, digital media, events, etc.



Actors	Role
Children	Implementer + user
Adults	Implementer + user
School	Partner + implementer
Municipality	Advisor + facilitator + implementer
Creative practitioners Young designers	Design + implementer

**Figure 2:** Huasipichanga's methodology steps and actors involved in the process.



## 2.1 Methodology - Proximity of Care



To understand the challenges and opportunities in the location and the Pinceles y Margaritas School site, a combination of the Huasipichanga approach and Proximity of Care assessment tools was used.

For the assessment process, the three main stakeholders are: the NGO Solitierra, the art school "Pinceles y Margaritas" and the local residents (0-5 children and caregivers).

The following methods were used in the elaboration of the research and production of the report:

- Desk based review analysis regarding the school's site and surroundings. The area of study is a circle of 800 meters around the Pinceles y Margaritas School. Numerous studies suggest this is the maximum distance for children to engage in physically active journey to school.

- Semi-structured interviews to the school's principal, Maria del Carmen Calderon, and the president of the Solitierra Foundation, Andres Galarza. They both have had active roles engaging children and caregivers.

- Surveys to fifteen caregivers and children during school hours and during their walks from school to home.

- Two transect walks, with and without the children and caregivers, to comprehend the



different types of uses and users in public spaces. This activity revealed the public space's flaws and opportunities.

- Workshops with the children, caregivers and the school staff. A mapping workshop was used to understand the public spaces where children and caregivers feel happy and safe or unhappy and insecure. A conversation and debate was guided by Huasipichanga, around the importance of education and urban planning/designing. The school staff has had an active role during the Huasipichanga visit to meet the children and caregivers.

- A photo contest with the 3-5 year old students. The pictures, by the small children were taken in the school and around the neighbourhood. This was an eye opening activity, to see exactly what small children see when walking on the sidewalk, crossing the street, playing in the park, etc.

The first outcomes of these different methods portray a remarkable school and a very engaged community.

The results of this assessment are structured around the four Dimensions of the Proximity of Care Framework – Health, Protection, Stimulation and Support, with an introductory section about the site's geographic, demographic and socio-economic conditions.

## 2.2 Overview

### Location

The assessed location is in the Totoracocha and Monay neighborhoods. These areas include middle-income neighbourhoods, with a diverse population with different cultural and educational backgrounds. Many shops and commerce are on the main streets, while the inner roads are primarily for residential use.

Two main types of families can be found, both are common in these communities and also represent a pattern in Cuenca:

- Many children of this area of Cuenca are part of a regional trend of migration families. One or both parents have traveled to foreign countries (mainly to the USA and Europe) to work and send money back to their children and families. Many kids are growing up with their grandparents, aunts, or uncles.

- Cuenca is the third largest city in Ecuador, an economic and cultural regional

powerhouse. Thus, there is a constant flux of internal migration to the city. The neighbourhoods where the school is located have plenty of cheap housing available for rent or buy. Many children and their families live in an entirely new place for them and, as newcomers, they are looking to be included within the community. Most of these families arrived from other regions of Ecuador (Coast or Amazonia) or indigenous communities, bringing new traditions and values as well. International migrants are also present in these areas, primarily Venezuelans or Colombians refugees that arrived in the last couple of years.

The neighborhood lacks proper street signage. It is difficult for children and adults to cross the streets. Public areas are poorly lit. There is a lack of urban furniture in the nearby parks, no place to rest and no bins for garbage.



## The Pinceles y Margaritas School

The Solitierra foundation was established as a non-profit organization in the early 1980s. The primary purpose of the foundation is educational projects and community development. Since the foundation's early days, it has sought ways to help underserved communities in Cuenca and the region.

The municipality of Cuenca donated a plot of land on behalf of the foundation to create an art school. The foundation then built two classrooms, restrooms, storage, and office space for the school to start. Since the beginning, the foundation has aspired to increase its community reach and educational work and eventually transform the initial art school into an elementary and secondary school.

The school's location and programming have made the institution a referent for the entire neighborhood. The school is known all over the East of the city as an affordable education option for families.

The school's infrastructure occupies around 20% of the plot, so most of the space is an open grass play area. The principal and director have big dreams for this area, where different kinds of playgrounds could be built. Other projects

imagine the open space for other uses, like planting an orchard or building a tipi tent. Since the primary pursuit of the school is art, the programs include involving the children in painting the school walls with a creative motif.

The school is also actively addressing issues within the neighborhood and the children. It is in the process of creating a program to fund a scholarship for single mothers or vulnerable motherhood (illness or studying). The foundation is open to all children without discrimination. Therefore, the foundation attempts to expand its work to children living on the streets, refugees, and families in extreme poverty.

Most of the families that have children at the school are working-class families. Usually, both parents work and some have their own local shop. Most children walk to school.

Although most of the roads in this area are paved, the sidewalks are badly built. Surfaces and materials vary from block to block; there is no design consideration for people with moving disabilities.

The school is located in the middle of public bus routes and transit connections, so it has become an easy place to pick up and drop off children while their guardians are commuting.



**Figure 3:** Location map of the Pinceles y Margaritas school and surroundings.

### 3 KEY CHALLENGES

This section describes the key challenges identified in Cuenca, using the Proximity of Care Approach and the Huasipichanga methodology.



### 3.1 Health challenges

The Health Dimension of the Proximity-to-Care Approach assesses those factors that contribute to a healthy and nurturing environment for optimal early childhood development, examining how to improve physical, mental, and emotional health and support cognitive development among young children, their caregivers and pregnant women.



#### Household level

Citizens who live in single-family homes deposit solid waste inside plastic bags and on established collection days they place it in the automatic folding metal grills installed in front of each property. However, piles of household waste is found on the sidewalks outside each home. This makes caregivers and children vulnerable to inhaling harmful toxins or be in touch with germs.

Noise and air pollution from vehicles can be found in the area, disrupting the physical and mental safety of children and caregivers. Also, dust and ambient air

pollution, expose homes to harmful pollutants.

The lack of door-to-door services for pregnant women and monthly prenatal check-ups is notorious, since these are located at a great distance from homes. While there are free care centers, they also incur higher costs. Pediatric services are also not satisfactory in public establishments due to the quality of the service. Therefore, some caregivers choose to take their children to private health centers due to the perception of better quality.





## Neighborhood level

There are no toilet blocks in the neighborhood designed for small children or for users with disabilities. There are also no dedicated breastfeeding or baby changing facilities. There is a Community Integration Centre with public toilets. However, this facility is currently closed and in disuse. Even in large public spaces such as parks, this lack of hygiene services is evident. This drives young children out of the public realm and disrupts the daily lives of their caregivers. In the city, most of the public toilet blocks, which are scarce, are segregated for adult users and have been built with standardized sizes for adults. This creates barriers for children to access and use them independently affecting their development and health.

There are no drinking fountains in public spaces. This causes people to buy bottled water and therefore increase plastic waste and carbon emissions.

In the neighborhood there are several pharmacies and private dental clinics. However, there are no specific health facilities for prenatal or pediatric care in the neighborhood or in the general area. Access to comprehensive prenatal or pediatric care is only available in hospitals outside the neighborhood. The closest hospital is the IESS Maternal and Child Health Center, which is located at 25-minutes away, by walking. There are other private hospitals and clinics for which people must spend more money to access and travel a longer distance. In general, the residents of the neighborhood face

difficulties in accessing medical centers, since most of these clinics are located in formal neighborhoods (west of Cuenca). This has a great impact, especially on pregnant women and children who may need urgent medical attention. This service should be prioritized and available to pregnant women, many of whom are single mothers who are most at risk of not receiving adequate prenatal care.

In the neighborhood there are no daycare facilities. Normally, young children stay at home with family members instead of daycare centers. This may affect their stimulation and interaction skills. There are also disadvantages to stay-at-home parenting, thus children may not learn the social skills their daycare peers achieve at young ages and may experience separation anxiety later when they have to start school.

Polluted built environments can be found in some areas (air pollution, garbage, dog excrement). Piles of garbage make public spaces and their surroundings look unsafe. This has often caused the degradation of children's living environment where they should be playing. Young children playing on the streets and parks or crawling on the ground are exposed to garbage and unsafe elements. This puts younger children especially at risk of environmental toxins and will expose them to dangerous effects on their digestive, immune, and central nervous development. Dog excrement is found on some sidewalks, exposing children to highly concentrated microbial hazards.



Map 1: The map shows areas where there are pharmacies (light blue), dental clinics (purple) and clinical laboratories (orange). Health facilities for prenatal or pediatric care (pink) are few and outside the neighbourhood.



Figure 4: Dirty and neglected Guatana park that is currently abandoned.



## City level

In Cuenca, the way in which the population is inserted in the social process of production, the relationship with the means of production and the role they play in the social organization of work, gives rise to the clearly differentiated social classes. Their ways and lifestyles are associated with greater vulnerability to health problems.

The proportion between health, illness and death is differential according to the material conditions of life, that is, according to the socioeconomic conditions of specific social groups. The social class category defines the relationship of individuals as social agents in a specific social formation.

Regarding the distribution of social classes by parish, the poor middle class is found in greater proportion in the parishes of Monay and Totoracocho.

In a study carried out in 2018, the results showed that Cuenca is a scenario where epidemiological and spatial expressions of

the capitalist model of the city are manifested, which conditions critical socio-epidemiological and environmental processes, such as an urban development whose implementations of a productive, mobility and of habitability, obey a discriminatory and excluding social order, which derives in evident contrasts in the levels of exposure and air pollution, and the consequent differentials in the respiratory rates of the most vulnerable child population.

PM10 values have not exceeded the national standard, but in all measurement points it exceeds the levels considered as limits in the OMS guide, so that the inhabitants of the city are exposed to dangerous levels of this pollutant, which is related with increased vulnerability to respiratory processes, especially in children. Air pollution is high within this sector, an area with high vehicular traffic, and in which a greater number of people from the poor middle class live.

## 3.2 PROTECTION CHALLENGES

The Protection Dimension of the Proximity of Care Approach assesses the factors that contribute to a safe and secure environment for optimal early childhood development, determining how to reduce risks, mitigate hazards and increase the safety of children, and improve the caregivers' perception and experience of safety and security.



### Neighborhood level

Some of the public spaces do not provide inclusive areas for children, which means they cannot play safely. Above all, younger children cannot access public areas without being accompanied by an adult to cross roads with heavy traffic safely. Interviewed neighbours consider public areas unsafe due to the known drug abuse in these spaces, as well as crime that has been reported in the neighborhood. They also indicate that it is difficult for children to go to some parks because there are too many loose aggressive dogs. Play spaces in parks can often be unsafe because of no planning or maintenance.

The lack of road signs and the intense traffic flows at rush hours on the avenues expose children to many risks in their neighborhoods. Residents mention that speeding and the lack of traffic lights is notorious, especially on Av. Pumapungo. This often causes accidents, especially after school when traffic flow is higher and when children are playing on the streets.

Secondary streets and alleys are also popular places for children to play, however, these are considered unsafe.

Some residents say they fear their children may be kidnapped when they are alone outside.

The main climatic threat in Cuenca and the neighbourhood is the overflow of the rivers in rainy seasons. This represents a risk for the citizens when sitting or resting close to the river banks. Also, small children who play on the river bank can slip on the wet grass and fall into the water.

Residents have witnessed insecurity and crime in the neighborhood. They mention that despite having police stations nearby, there is quite limited support provided by them. They also indicate that there is a lack of enforcement patrol, especially at night.

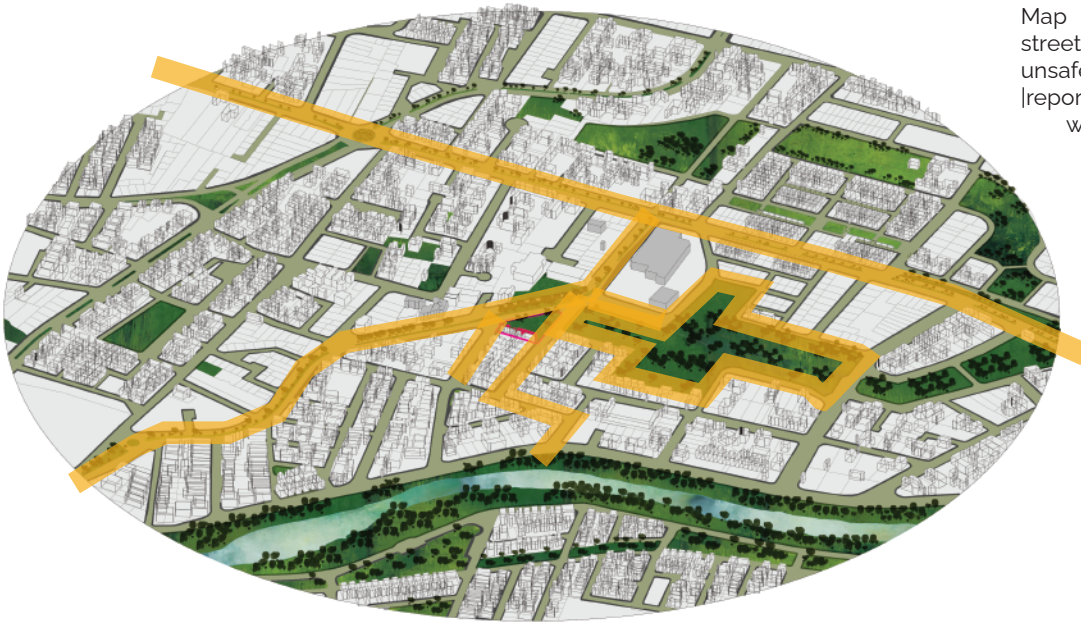
The pathways between the different spaces in the neighborhood are poorly lit. Several caregivers reported feeling unsafe when using these routes. Improving this would be beneficial to mitigate and deal with criminal incidents.



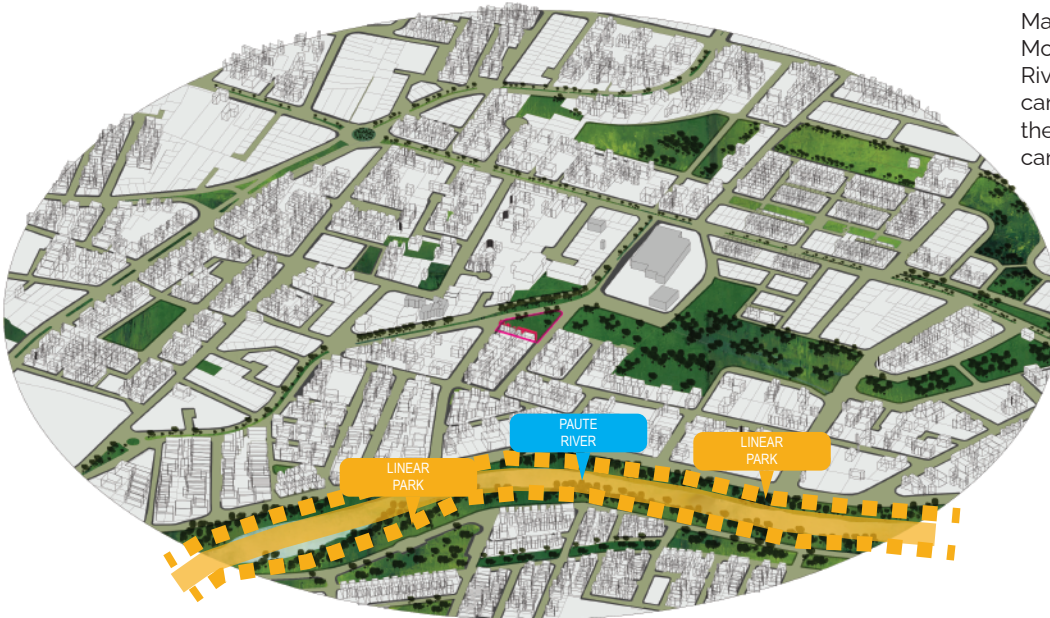
**Figure 5:** The Andalucia Park, next to the school, does not have inclusive areas for young children. Because no residents use it, this park is considered unsafe by many of the caregivers.



Map 2: The map marks the streets where caregivers feel unsafe. Several residents reported that they felt insecure when they used their routes.



Map 3: The map shows the Monay linear park near the Paute River, which in climatic threats can become a challenge due to the high flow of the river and this can cause accidents if there are children playing nearby.



Map 4: The map shows areas where there are two police stations near the educational unit, however, respondents mentioned that there is a fairly limited support, especially at night.





## City level

The streets that lead to the school and public parks also become a barrier to the mobility of younger children, as one interviewee said: "not any child can cross that street and go to the park unless the parents are supervising". This is a situation that happens in various parts of the city. There are few traffic signs or pedestrian crossings. Cars drive at high speeds and rarely stop to allow children to cross the street. Thus, if it is the case that their parents cannot accompany them, younger children find themselves deprived of outdoor play experiences.

While most of the secondary streets connecting the school to other neighborhoods are in good condition, there is no dedicated space for non-motorized transportation. This creates an unsafe

environment for children, many of whom walk and run, as well as play in the streets, due to lack of or minimal access to play spaces.

The results of the caregivers surveys show that respondents feel unsafe walking in the immediate neighborhood of the school at night. During the workshop discussion (FGD) respondents also indicated that they often feel unsafe in the neighborhood due to the fact that break-ins are common.



### 3.3 STIMULATION CHALLENGES

The Stimulation Dimension of the Proximity of Care Approach assesses those factors that contribute to an enriching and stimulating environment for optimal early childhood development, addressing how to improve the quality of children's interaction with caregivers, peers, other adults and the physical space around them.



#### **Household level**

Among the households, there are only a few community integration centers to meet or socialize. However, these are closed and in disuse, which discourages the social experience of people. Although the neighborhood has several parks, there is no security of any kind around them. The absence of common space activity between households can discourage social interaction. Coupled with dangerous streets and unsafe public parks, this again limits a child's play experience to the confines of their immediate home environment.

The perceived insecurity and lack of cleanliness within the neighborhood leads some caregivers to restrict their children's mobility outside, limiting opportunities for exploratory, meaningful and stimulating play experiences. This restricts a child's ability to explore his/her environment and develop his/her creative thinking skills. It also denies them the opportunity to interact with other children beyond the confines of their home and the street.

In most households, adult caregivers work during the day to generate income. Combined travel and work hours can be more than 12 hours per day, limiting time spent at home with their children. Therefore, those who will provide child care are relatives or their own siblings. This deprives children of quality interaction with their main caregiver and others.

Younger children who live in smaller homes with limited outdoor space and few play areas will be at a disadvantage in their learning and play experience. This also increases the burden on caregivers and parents to provide optimal conditions for

their children to learn within the home.

It appears that households in the area near the school do not have an accessible and safe outdoor space designated for play activities. Therefore, there are no outdoor spaces that provide an enriching, safe and stimulating play space in which children can share and interact. Additionally, during the rainy season and cold spells, children are likely to be confined to the home, where playing conditions are not optimal for some.



#### **Neighborhood level**

The neighborhood lacks public spaces with stimulating activities that help develop children's creativity. Although organized camps and activities are held at the educational unit, participation is generally conducted solely within the educational unit. Several respondents mention the lack of play spaces for children in the neighborhood. In addition, the spaces that exist have basic recreational facilities or are not suitable for children under 5 years of age. This denies children the opportunity for collaborative and exploratory play whereby they can learn from other children and individuals in their play ecosystem. Pinceles y Margaritas school is the only accessible and stimulating childcare facility in the neighborhood.

The absence of public street furniture in all neighborhoods leaves older caregivers without places for rest and keep an eye on their children. It also means that children do not have a high-value play space where they can interact with others. In the parks there is few furniture and well maintained.

Andalucía Park has a total size of 4500m<sup>2</sup>. Of this, approximately 15% is formalized public space and sport fields. One section is characterized by paths and walkways, along where children explore and play. Crucially, there is a shortage of play stimulants in the areas and therefore children must create their own fun. While this encourages creativity, it can deprive children of rewarding play experiences in which they can safely explore their environment.



## City Level

Building a more stimulating and welcoming space for children in the sector is a challenge. There is a general lack of understanding of the value of play as a basis for creativity and innovation. The research found little awareness of the critical role in understanding young children's learning through play.



**Figure 6:** In the Andalucía Park, which is situated nearby to school, there is a shortage of stimulating games and therefore the children must create their own fun.



**Map 5:** The map shows the parks that exist in the area and those that are abandoned without any kind of intervention.

## 3.4 SUPPORT CHALLENGES

The Support Dimension of the Proximity of Care Approach assesses those factors that contribute to an environment of knowledge and support for optimal early childhood development, looking at how to improve knowledge, support from city authorities and members of the community, and include the voices of beneficiaries in decision-making and planning.

### Neighborhood level



It is evident, the lack of intervention of the public institutions identified as responsible for the maintenance and protection of the neighborhood and its surrounding public spaces. Many of the caregivers feel this absence as one of the reasons for the poor quality of the parks and the lack of traffic control. This conditions the use of public spaces, especially for children who often do not have a playground to play, or a clean grass to run on.

The lack of leadership in the neighborhood is notable, even within people who care about the interests of small children. The neighborhood caregivers say they do not know who to talk to about the lack of protection and interest given to the children of the neighborhood. This group

(early childhood) tends to have less priority in the decision-making process or in policy planning. Thus, there is no type of programs developed around the protection or learning of children.

The infrastructure that the parks have is not equipped with spaces that welcome the caregivers, or people in general, to wait or socialize. Due to the poor quality of these spaces, most of the time they are represented by green lawns and trees that do not respond to any design plan. This is the case of the park located next to the school, which is seen as a place of distraction for most of the children, but does not have furnitures for the caregivers to sit on while the children play.

**Figure 8:** Within the neighbourhood there is a skate park for young people. However, there are no interventions designed for children under 5 years of age.





## City level

Children and women are almost completely excluded from political decision-making in the city of Cuenca. This could explain the lack of child-friendly spaces in many neighborhoods, as opportunities to express the need for such spaces are rare. The limited representation of carers also obscures the specific challenges related to their caregiving obligations and can lead to a sense of powerlessness and isolation where their livelihoods are under pressure.

City leaders do not consider or understand the importance of neighborhood early childhood development programming. The municipality does not allocate part of its annual budget to child-focused projects and the city's master plan does not provide adequate facilities for children, such as

daycare centers, libraries or community halls. Furthermore, while there are areas designated for public spaces and public gardens, these are often left out of municipal priorities and their development is neglected.

**Figure 9:** Workshop with children and caregivers, where they gave us their opinions regarding the lack of leadership in the neighborhood, especially caregivers who care about the interests of children.



## 4 KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Using the Proximity of Care approach, a different set of opportunities has been identified at the Pinceles y Margaritas School in the Health, Protection, Stimulation and Support dimensions, at three different urban scales: Household, Neighborhood and City level.



## 4.1 Health opportunities

The characteristics of health in Cuenca are inverse in a conflictive system of public and private facilities unfairly distributed throughout the city, which is contrasted by a green patch of public spaces. These open spaces develop a strong network that offers a unique potential to provide the city with a system of air purifying spaces that helps control some of the health characteristics of all the citizens. Although this kind of infrastructure is presented as a public resource, and its benefits are expected to help all people equally, it is important that the access to early childhood and their caregivers is assured.



### Household level

The green patch of public spaces absorbs Pinceles y Margaritas school in a remarkable infrastructure of parks. The Andalucía Park, located next to the institution, represents a big opportunity for the expansion of children's activities beyond the physical limits of the school, giving children the opportunity to develop more activities in an open environment.

The 20 students that are currently enrolled at the school, rarely have the opportunity to go to the park by themselves, even though it is so close. The presence of a street between the school and the park marks an important physical barrier that converts the park into an inaccessible space, limiting its interaction with the school's children. Always guarded by their parents, children enjoy the small playground randomly placed on one side of the park, and the small hill that allows them to roll. Even though the park does not present a good design, and needs to be equipped with garbage bins, toilets, and furniture; children enjoy running from one corner to another on the grass, or taking advantage of the limited types of surfaces the park has.



### Neighborhood level

The presence of the Guatana Park to the north of the school, and the riverbank of the Machangara River to the south, sets a strategic green corridor that can build a great park for the neighborhood, improving its environmental characteristics by

increasing its opportunities to enhance its flora and fauna, as well as giving the opportunity to decontaminate the air.

Nowadays, these spaces are separated by avenues that are commonly used by cars and buses moving at high speed, disturbing the space around them. This is often perceived as an uncomfortable place for pedestrians to walk or cross, and as a dangerous place for children to approach.



### City level

Cuenca has gone through an important urban planning process that helped to develop an important system of public parks, known as Cinturon Verde. This strategy sought to provide green space to a large part of the population of the city, ensuring their access to public space, and improving the environmental quality of each neighbourhood, and the city in general.

This network not only helped to protect access to a more healthy environment for the citizens but also to improve the connectivity in the city. While these spaces were designed as a network of public spaces, they also enabled a clearer connection between different infrastructures, including health facilities.



**Map 6:** The map shows the remarkable network of parks that exist in the area.



**Figure 10:** Set of images, showing the state of green areas in the neighbourhood.



## 4.2 Protection opportunities

Child care is not very often presented as the main need in the context of Cuenca. Usually, the mother takes care of the children until they go to school, limiting their contact and interaction with children their age. Nevertheless, in precarious situations, child care can represent an issue not only for the mother but for the child. In this frame, Pinceles y Margaritas school offers a protective environment for people in fragile situations, responding to the needs of some of the families in the neighbourhood.

The intervention of public institutions is presented as the key to the development of a protective environment, especially in the case of children. In Cuenca, the management and maintenance of public spaces are in charge of different institutions that follow multiple procedures to respond to a request. While their actions are preceded by bureaucratic procedures, cooperation and teaching sessions are more accessible as a way to shorten distances with society. Different programs are offered by many public institutions that mainly sought to change the behaviour the people have toward their environment.



### Household level

The school provides help to some vulnerable groups around the area. It usually takes care of children who are going through difficult situations, supporting parents in need. The school now welcomes children between 3 and 5 years, and soon will receive children between 0 and 2 years. In this way, the school works as a place of protection that helps to mitigate the issues present in the low income society present in the surroundings.

On the other hand, the school has always sought the intervention and cooperation of the different municipal and public institutions, which have shown interest in the different learning processes and events the school offers to its children. Environmental institutions, firefighters, museums, among others, are part of different schedules organized by the school to have visits and interactive classes that could allow children to expand their knowledge in different aspects. For instance, the Municipal Public Company of Mobility, Transit and Transportation agreed to visit the school to teach classes on mobility that could start building a responsible character in children to improve the culture of mobilization in the society.

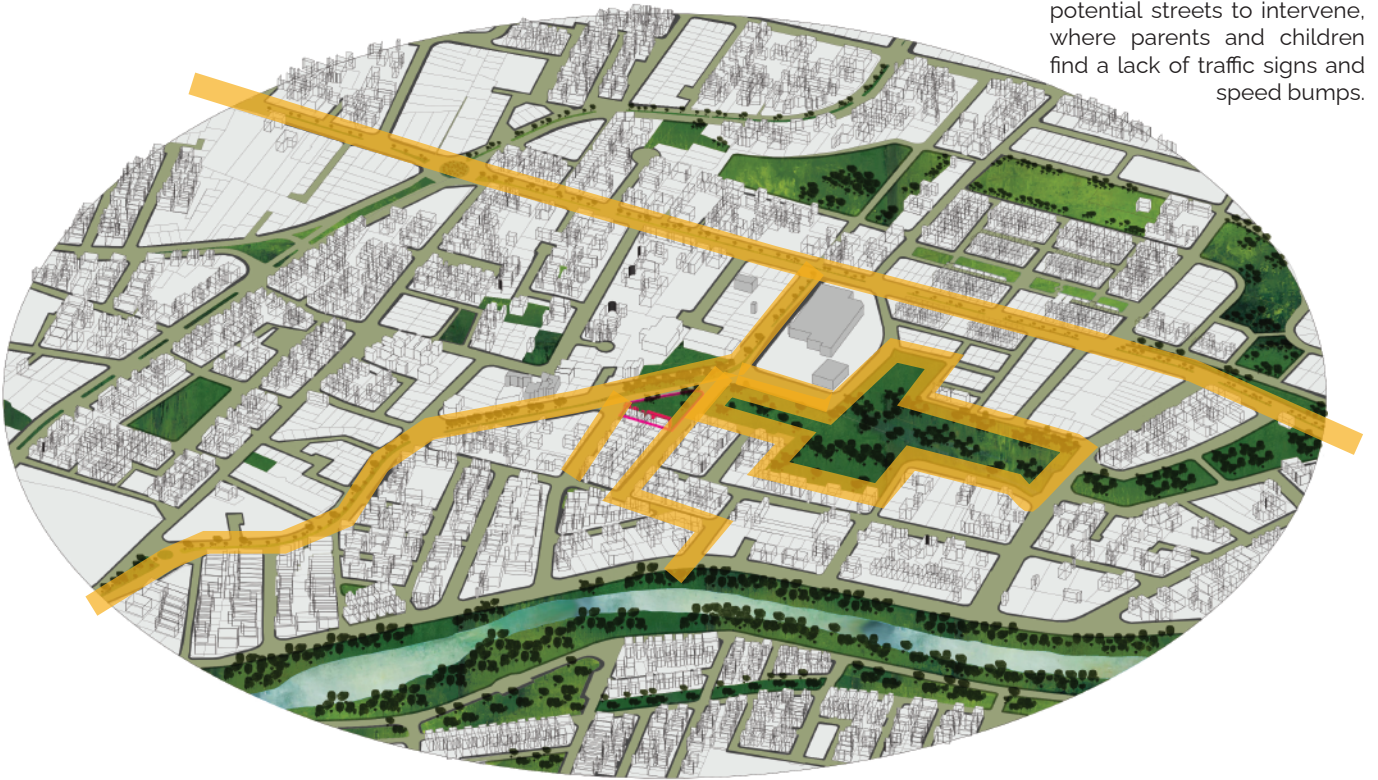


### Neighborhood level

The good relationship the school has built with some of the public institutions, specially the one responsible for the mobilization regulations in the city, could help to obtain some opportunities to improve the mobilization characteristics of the neighborhood. Due to the presence of the Gonzalez Suarez Avenue to the north of the school, and the Pumapungo Avenue to the south, both very busy streets, the pedestrian mobility to these extremes is quite limited. Also, the high speed use given to the secondary streets around the school, confines it to its own plot, reducing the use of the surrounding parks and green areas and limiting the interaction children can have with these places.

The implementation of traffic signs and speed bumps could help to build a more protective infrastructure that could present them as a more accessible environment, becoming a more feasible option for pedestrians to extend what they could perceive as one space. This can also allow all kinds of people to use some spaces that are considered dangerous, or that have been neglected due to their location.

**Map 7:** The map shows the potential streets to intervene, where parents and children find a lack of traffic signs and speed bumps.



**Figure 11:** Set of images showing the current state of streets and parents meeting at the school to address the local challenges and opportunities.

## 4.3 STIMULATION OPPORTUNITIES

As a caretaker place, the Pinceles y Margaritas institution keeps its main principle focus on art. It seeks to build an interactive environment that has children as the protagonist and authors of creative processes that could develop a more stimulating space for them. The surroundings of the school are also presented as a potential opportunity to enhance more activities as it is made up of several public spaces. For this, these parks need to be rethought to offer a wide variety of activities that can respond to the different tastes of children. In the same way, these places can also present stimulating characteristics for caregivers, by offering spaces for them to share with their children, or among themselves. In this way, these spaces can be better used and improve the general appreciation and atmosphere of the public space in the neighbourhood.



### Household level

The school uses art as the core for the development of its learning, fostering participatory and co-creative processes with its children that helps to build a better intellectual and cognitive development in them. These processes tend to use innovative scenarios that allow children to explore their environment from different perspectives. For instance, the school is planning on painting its walls, having children as the main artist. They will have the chance to use sponges that will help them to stamp shapes on the external walls of the institution, creating a characteristic pattern for the school. These kinds of activities not only improve the development of children, but also teaches them to appreciate their creation and increase their self esteem.

Having art as the main focus creates a unique perspective that gives a particularity to the school. The way in which this concept is handled by the institution can also improve its physical characteristics and even its surroundings, developing a very inclusive atmosphere that could have a child-friendly environment as its badge.

The environment of the school can also be improved by taking advantage of the Andalucía park, located next to it across the street. This infrastructure can be considered for daily interaction, building a more stimulating place for children. This space can give children more options of activities to do in open spaces, and change their perspective of having the park as a

place they can go only after school. This also modified the concepts and perspectives they can build about what a public and private space, altering the functioning of these spaces in the future.



### Neighborhood level

The green patch that penetrates the neighbourhood offers multiple opportunities to develop stimulating environments that can improve the life quality of children and caregivers. The appropriate use of all of these spaces can create a well-structured network that satisfies the basic needs of the people around them. For this, these places need to be well equipped, and present a consistent design, considering the system of which it is part and even a bigger scale.

Furniture, playgrounds and toilets, among others, are some of the characteristics the different parks in the neighbourhood need to build a stimulating environment that could welcome children and caregivers.

These parks can also work as potential sites for the closest schools, working as alleviating spaces for those institutions that do not have adequate facilities for the proper development of children. This can build a strong system that could improve the urban structure and its functioning, always demanding a re-thinking of the public spaces as they are conceived.



**Figure 12:** Margaritas y Pinceles school students sitting and playing in the Andalusia Park

**Map 8:** The map shows the proximity between de Andalusia park and the Pinceles y Margaritas school.



## 4.4 SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

The existing infrastructure in and around the school presents the potential to become important places for more than one purpose. The institution works as an important place for the interaction of not only children, but also their caregivers by giving them a welcome space. Its yard and bench unfolds as a place to talk or just to rest, offering the opportunity to be surrounded by a supportive environment. In the same way, the network of parks and green areas can host activities that increase the use of public space and improve the quality of the neighborhood by generating spaces with movement that increase the feeling of security. The opportunity to have this type of place improves the quality of life and generates a supportive environment, generating more opportunities to develop vibrant spaces, and a chance to have the option that more things can

### Household level



The school takes into account not only the children's needs, but also their caregivers. A constant interaction between the school and the parents has helped to build a strong relationship based on trust and cooperation. Although the interest for the children is the main basis, the conditions in which these interactions are built are important. For this, the school infrastructure develops as the main scenario for long or short conversations, a greeting, or simply the exchange of glances. This helps to create a supportive environment for the caregivers that go to school not only to take care of their children, but also to have a moment of distraction that could also improve their quality of life. In this way, school is not only at the service of children, but of society, becoming an important infrastructure.

### Neighborhood level



The infrastructure surrounding the school could be considered as a potential place for the development of a supportive environment. The Andalucia park can not only expand the options children could have while attending to the institution, by giving them the opportunity to play, run, walk, scream or laugh; it is a big opportunity for the expansion of a supportive space that could welcome them during school hours, and also as an arrival space or as a waiting place. The activities the Park could host will strongly determine its use and the interaction they could receive from children, and also from caregivers. It can also be seen as a venting place for the neighborhood, that is not attached to the requirements of the school and its users, but also of society in general.



**Figure 13:** The Pinceles y Margaritas school and Solitierra Foundation directors during the interview.



**Figure 14:** Students playing in the Pinceles y Margaritas school yard.



**Figure 15:** Parents meeting in the school to provide support for their children.







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