Collaborative design of public space: A case study of three Chilean processes

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Co-design follows both participatory design and collaborative theoretical trajectories. The urban field has adopted these concepts in the last decades considering the involvement of users, but also a wide variety of stakeholders in the design processes. However, much studies on collaborative design focus on one-time events analyzing group dynamics, methods and design outcomes. Recent publications have expressed the need to amplify the temporal scope of collaborative design studies into long-term understandings that can capture its evolution. The question remains how to analyze collaborative design in the long-term? This article presents a case study of three Chilean public space design processes based on data obtained in 2019 and 2020, and thirty-three semi-structured interviews of key participants. We developed a two-steps analytical framework to assess collaborative design in the long-term. First, the collaboration achieved by the actors expands the participation ladder into a further level that stresses a long-term collaboration. Then, the level of co-design accomplished within the activities builds on the basic design cycle. We observed that collaboration happened in three design arenas depending on the types of decisions, the actors, and the interactions: the strategic, the technical, and the cultural arenas. The study suggests that the high levels of collaboration are only achieved in the long-term, and that co-design unfolded in cycles of knowledge contribution, shared analysis, variation of solutions, and decision-making through the process. The analysis allowed a long-term approach that envisions the changing roles of the arenas throughout the phases of a project. It highlights a prominent role of the cultural arena in the operation phase as a desirable outcome of collaboration. Our framework is useful to assess and plan further collaborative design processes in Chile and elsewhere.

Keywords: co-design, co-creation, co-production, collaborative design, participatory design, design process, public space.