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REDEFINING THIRD PLACES THROUGH A SERVICE DESIGN APPROACH  
to strengthen Community Building, Well-being, and Work-Life Balance among women in  
Lima

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Background of the research problem.....	6
1.2 Motivation for the study.....	8
1.3 Research aim and objectives.....	10
1.4 Definition of key terms and limitations of the research.....	10
1.5 Summary of the methodology.....	11
1.6 Structure of the thesis.....	12
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	14
2.1 Third Place theory.....	14
2.1.1 The problem of the lack of third places.....	16
2.1.2 Livable Cities.....	18
2.1.3 Third places and gender.....	19
2.2 The relevance of Third Place and emerging forms.....	21
2.2.1 Hyperconnectivity Era.....	22
2.2.2 The epidemic of loneliness and social isolation.....	23
2.2.3 Post-pandemic Legacy.....	26
2.2.4 Emerging forms of third place.....	27
2.3 Lima City context.....	29
2.3.1 Third places in Peru and Lima.....	31
2.3.3 Gender gap in Peru.....	36
2.4 Service Design and third places.....	39
2.4.1 Humanity-centered Design.....	41
2.4.2 Placemaking.....	42

2.4.3 Gender- sensitive Design.....	44
3. RESEARCH DESIGN.....	46
3.1 Research methodology.....	46
3.2 Research strategy.....	46
3.3 Data collection and analysis methods.....	46
3.4 Ethical considerations and limitations.....	48
4. RESULTS.....	50
4.1 Redefining the Third Place model.....	50
4.2 Women’s evolution in the use of third place according to age, work format, and living situation.....	53
4.2.1 Age and Life Stage: The Evolving Role of Third Places.....	53
4.2.2 Work Format: On-Site, Hybrid, and Remote Workers.....	55
4.2.3. Living situation: alone, in a Couple, or with Family.....	55
4.3 Value and general discoveries concerning third place for women in Lima.....	57
General discoveries concerning third place for women in Lima.....	57
4.4 Women’s limitations for participating in third places in Lima.....	60
4.5 New needs in the design of Great Third Places.....	62
4.6 The Real Third Place Design Checklist (Lima, Peru – Women-Focused).....	65
5. DISCUSSION.....	67
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	69
REFERENCES.....	72
APPENDICES.....	81

## **Abstract**

The topic of third places has been widely debated in Western Europe and North American countries, with scholars such as Oldenburg and Klineberg arguing about its key role in society around work-life balance, well-being, and community building. However, the characteristics and perspectives are becoming outdated and must be revised to our context and time. Particularly, in this study, I look at third places and women to show the evolution in their needs and the limitations they face. To address these issues, I propose a state-of-the-art model for understanding third places, which I call *The Real Third Place*, alongside a service design guideline developed through a gender-sensitive lens for third place stakeholders. Based on a literature review and ethnographic interviews, this research explores the core values of third places and offers strategies to make them more inclusive for women in Lima. My thesis conclusion emphasizes how Service Design through a gender-sensitive perspective can help reimagine third places to strengthen community, well-being, and work-life balance in Lima. Places where women feel present, safe, and themselves; focused more the emotional function, than in the physical form by creating micro-moments of well-being, connection, and self-care in a city that often limits their time, energy, and access. This approach ensures that women have equal access to, and can fully benefit from, urban life and the opportunities offered by third places—just as men do. Ultimately, the study sheds new light on the development of third places as a means to address gender inequalities and elevates the quality of life for women in Lima.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the research problem**

This study aims to develop a state-of-the-art model for understanding third places—informal public spaces where people gather outside of home and work—through a gender-sensitive lens. As specified by Ray Oldenburg, an American urban sociologist, third places are “the core settings of informal public life” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16). These places provide relieving spaces that support mental well-being and reduce stress. They also balance work-life matters to maximise their productivity by effectively distinguishing work and personal life.

With shifts in work patterns, digital connectivity, economy, and social interactions, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unclear whether third places continue to meet people’s evolving needs. Nowadays, as the rhythm of life is more and more hectic, surrounded by social media dopamine and consumerism, and high stress levels, these places become more relevant than ever before. The heavy usage of the internet is taking people’s attention for an average of 7 to 10 hours a day, leaving little time for the effort required to nurture social bonds.

While Ray Oldenburg's original concept of third places emphasized informality, neutrality, and conversation, today’s social and economic conditions have blurred the lines between home, work, and leisure. This leads us to ask: Is it the end of traditional third places? The academic discourse has not sufficiently addressed this concern, particularly in non-Western contexts such as Lima, Peru. At the same time, a new type of environment has emerged, which scholars are beginning to call Hybrid Third Places, that blends elements of productivity, consumption, leisure, and even wellness. However, little is known about how these hybrid spaces function in practice and whether they genuinely respond to people's emotional, social, and practical needs. Are Hybrid Third Places covering people's emerging needs? What new changes and needs have emerged that challenge old models of third place design? These are questions that remain largely unexplored in current research, are creating a clear gap in understanding how spatial, cultural, and social dynamics are reshaping the ways individuals, especially women, interact with informal public spaces

today. Addressing this gap is critical for proposing an inclusive third place design guideline that supports well-being, work-life balance, and meaningful social interaction.

By focusing on the context of Lima, Peru, where urban inequality, time poverty, and safety concerns disproportionately affect women, the research addresses the urgent need to adapt third place concept to local realities and evolving societal needs. In addition, an alarming number of mental health issues, where 29.4% of adults over 30 years old have experienced some mental or emotional health issues in the past 12 months, being women the most affected (Senaju, 2023).

In doing so, the study not only explores how women in Lima currently experience and perceive third places but also identifies design principles that make such spaces more inclusive, accessible, and emotionally supportive. Through qualitative research and a service design approach, it proposes a guideline for creating third places that respond to women's preferences, life stages, and constraints. Ultimately, it offers a framework to inspire urban designers, municipalities, and community stakeholders to create spaces that strengthen well-being, community connection, and work-life balance.

## 1.2 Motivation for the study

I grew up in a residential building, where after school, my main motivation was eating fast and doing my homework to go to the park in front, where my friends would be there already sitting on the benches or playing with the ball. However, when you grow up and your friends start forming their own pathways, building their families, growing professionally, and each time having your friends available right there is more difficult, especially when you live in a very dense city like Lima (Peru), where traffic makes distances even longer. Therefore, you see your friends less often, time excuses, and exhaustion are usually the reasons for distancing. Not having them available all the time makes you feel lonely, without a tribe, questioning your belongingness: “Where do I belong?”

Three years ago, I moved to Barcelona (Spain) for work and discovered a different life dynamic, a city where people not only gathered on Fridays or Saturdays. Where people went out with friends regardless of the day, residential areas had coffee places, restaurants, and stores on the first floors of buildings, making gatherings convenient for residents. People and tables appropriated the public spaces. You could get “Patatas Bravas y una Caña” (fries and beer) in every restaurant or bar at an accessible price. Six in the afternoon was the moment when all bars, restaurants, and plazas were the busiest, unlike Lima, where that’s the moment of horns, stress, and traffic jams. In Barcelona, bars and restaurants weren’t the only activities people enjoyed aside from work and private life; neighborhood municipalities offered places such as “La Casa de la Cultura” (House of Culture), and communal libraries where people could attend diverse activities or just chill there. Also, there was a very active community of people self-organized in unions or NGO’s that provided the people with alternative movie nights, micro-theater, and dance lessons.

I wondered why in my city, Lima, people lived always in alert mode under high stress, and what efforts could be made to reduce it. Why do people crave Friday to arrive with so much desire, even there is this famous phrase “¡Es viernes y tu cuerpo lo sabe!” (It’s

Friday and your body knows it!), which is an invitation to release and lose the control retained during the weekdays. This reminded me that once, I was hosting a friend from Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) for some days in Lima, and he asked me: “Why do you have drug stores in every corner?” He told me it was like in Rio with gyms, you have them all over the place. But we were actually talking of a city which was proactively healthy, compared to a reactive city focused on alleviating the symptoms. Questions like this and other experiences I had while doing my Erasmus Mundus Master's Program in Nordic Countries motivated me to delve deeper into the topic of this study. Especially when I discovered the power of saunas, I found this place a key player in Nordic societies. In a culture where people appear to be distant and cold, sauna provided the atmosphere to bring them closer, relax, talk, and connect spiritually with themselves and others. Researching saunas is where I learned the concept of “third place” and decided to dive into it, questioning what those elements could be that connect people in Lima City?

Even though the term “third place” was created in 1998, our societies still need these places the most. As we currently live in a context where people spend unlimited hours a day in front of digital devices, experience high levels of stress, mental health issues keep rising, and face-to-face interactions are becoming a privilege of few. Therefore, in this particular study, I will focus on how third places have evolved and been used in time, as well as, how they are serving women in Lima, mapping those limitations to improve access and inclusivity. With this outcome, I look forward to contributing from a Service Design approach to the creation and prioritization of third places for a better work-life balance, well-being, and stronger communities. The insights from this research are also meant to provide a checklist as a guideline for better design of third places for more equitable urban development and support new policies and initiatives. Hence, people will feel they belong, feel better about themselves, and start caring more about the people they share with and their physical surroundings.

### **1.3 Research aim and objectives**

#### **Research aim**

This study aims to propose a state-of-the-art model for comprehending third places and the guidelines for designing gender-sensitive third places in Lima, Peru, from women's perspective.

#### **Research objectives**

1. Understand the current model and value of third places
2. Identify challenges women face when using third places in Lima
3. Propose a guideline to design gender-sensitive third places for women in Lima

To achieve these goals, I have proposed the following **research questions**:

RQ1: How do people use third places, and what are the roles and values of them?

RQ2: What are the challenges women in Lima face when using third places?

RQ3: How can third places be designed to tackle the identified challenges?

### **1.4 Definition of key terms and limitations of the research**

#### **1.4.1 Third Place**

Is the term use to refer to the place that host the informal public life of a person, it “is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home (first place) and work (second place).” (Oldenburg, 1999, p.16)

Sometimes, the term “third place” can be confused with “public spaces”, but the reality is that public spaces that host social interactions have become third places like parks, plazas, and markets. In other words, public spaces are a type of third place. Oldenburg, the author of this concept, emphasizes that third places are not defined by their physical characteristics alone but by their role in strengthening social interaction, inclusivity, and a sense of community.

### **1.4.2 Space vs Place**

The words space and place are sometimes used interchangeably, although they have different meanings. According to Cresswell, British geographer, "place is space that has been given meaning through human experience, memory, and emotion" (Cresswell, 2004, p.7). Yi-Fu Tuan, Chinese-American geographer, points out that a space becomes a “place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan,1977, p.6). Therefore, what turns any space into a place is the history of what happened there, the memories, the people, and the feelings associated.

### **1.4.3 Leisure**

Leisure is “the time when you are not working or doing other duties” (Cambridge University Press, 2025). Leisure is connected to third places because, like them, it emerged during the Industrial era as time set aside for activities outside of paid work (Tomlinson, 2010). For this research, we will focus on leisure outside of the home, as we will talk about third places.

## **1.5 Summary of the methodology**

To understand third place evolution, usage, value, and how they currently serve women in Lima, this study employed a Service Design Research approach, which integrates ethnographic tools to gather qualitative data. This included ten in-depth interviews with

women from different age groups (30s to 60s), who reside in various districts of Modern Lima (Santiago de Surco, Miraflores, San Isidro, San Borja, and La Molina). These women have diverse living situations—some lived alone, others with partners or family—and varied work arrangements (on-site, remote, or hybrid). Through this diversity, the research seeks to understand women’s behaviors, needs, and experiences related to leisure time and their use of third places.

In addition to interviews, participants engaged in a sketch session using design probes to express and visualize their ideal third place based on their current life circumstances. They also participated in a journey mapping exercise to reflect on how their relationship with third places has changed over time, considering different life stages and contextual shifts. This data was enriched by contrasting it with interviews from three men of different generations and two volunteers who currently manage public third places; offering broader insight into gendered and operational perspectives.

## **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

In the upcoming sections, I will present the theoretical background, which provides four chapters that will help the reader have the context to understand the topic of this research. The first chapter describes the Third Place Theory and the consequences of not having these places for a healthy and balanced city. Ending by highlighting the role of men and women in the informal public sphere.

The second chapter of this literature review focuses on the relevance of third places in our current context of high usage of technology and a growing social interaction crisis. It also examines the social consequences left by the pandemic era and how this has affected the way we interact with people and how third places are used.

The third chapter introduces the study’s setting—Lima City— by providing context about its history and current status. It also describes third places and the gender gap evidenced through past studies regarding leisure and public informal gatherings.

Finally, the fourth chapter discusses the importance of approaching third place's design through a Service Design perspective, describing the humanity-centered principles and their relevance to placemaking and gender-sensitive perspective.

Following this, the Research Design section details the qualitative, Service Design-based framework used in the study, which includes interviews with women of diverse backgrounds in Lima, design probes, and journey mapping. This section also addresses ethical considerations and acknowledges the limitations related to participant selection.

The Results section presents an analysis of the findings drawn from both secondary and primary sources. These results include a redefinition of the Third Place Theory model and propose new characteristics for a Great Third Place reflecting people's evolving needs. Additionally, this section highlights the specific limitations women face when accessing third places in Lima and proposes a service design guideline developed through a gender-sensitive perspective.

Additionally, the Discussion section answers all the questions proposed in this study regarding the use and value of third places and how these places can be designed to tackle the new challenges.

To end with, the Conclusion emphasizes how Service Design through a gender-sensitive perspective can help reimagine third places to strengthen community, well-being, and work-life balance in Lima,

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Third Place theory**

Third Place is a concept created in 1989 by Ray Oldenburg, an American sociologist, who lived for some time in France, and when he came back to the USA, he missed the places that made him belonged to France and balanced his life. The name “Third Place” comes from the understanding that everyone's home is their “First Place”, therefore your workplace or study place is your “Second Place”.

In that sense, to have a productive and healthy society, he argued that third places were key for people to release the load from work and not bring it home with them, and important as well, for not bringing home concerns to the workplace. Hence, third places work as buffers for productive societies, contributing to a healthier private life and a more vivid public life (Oldenburg, 1999).

Put simply, third places are informal public gathering places such as restaurants, bars, barber shops, malls, parks, markets, and churches. Oldenburg (1999) argues that after the Industrial Revolution, life became more fragmented: people lived in one place, worked in another, and socialized less due to urban design, long distances, and car dependence. In that context, third places became a necessary antidote to isolation and the individualism that came with capitalism.

The fact that the concept of third place was defined after the Industrial Revolution does not mean that informal public gathering places did not exist before—on the contrary, they have been a vital part of human society for thousands of years. The earliest civilizations, like the Sumerians, already had spaces like taverns and eateries where people could meet, eat, drink, and talk (Steinmeyer, 2023). In Ancient Greece, the Agora was not only a marketplace, but also a central public square where citizens gathered to exchange ideas, news, and philosophies casually and openly. Similarly, in Ancient Rome, Forums served as hubs of political debate, public speeches, and everyday conversations, essential for civic life and social cohesion (Kamel & Anwar, 2023).

Later, in the Ottoman Empire, the discovery and spread of coffee led to the creation of the first coffeehouses in what is now Istanbul (McGovern, 2022). These became vibrant social spaces where people gathered to drink coffee, play games, read poetry, and discuss politics or current events—open to anyone, regardless of class. This tradition traveled to Europe, especially to England, where coffeehouses became so intellectually active that some were nicknamed "penny universities" because, for the price of a single penny—the cost of a cup of coffee— people could engage in deep conversations and gain knowledge from others. During the Enlightenment, coffeehouses across Europe became hotbeds of new ideas, often fueling political and social movements like the French Revolution (Hattox, 1985). These places weren't just for fun or having a drink—they played an important role in how people shared ideas and stayed connected with their communities.

In short, while the essence of third places has existed throughout history, Oldenburg's formal definition of third place arises as a critique of their decline in modern Western society. His framework doesn't negate ancient communal spaces, but rather emphasizes the urgency of restoring such dynamics in today's disconnected urban landscapes. For this, he presents 8 characteristics that make third places a GREAT PLACE for people to enjoy of public informal gatherings. These characteristics are explained in the chart below:

Characteristic	Definition
Neutral ground	It is a neutral place where everyone is accepted. No one plays the host role.
Leveler	There are no official criteria for participation. They are places where social inequalities disappear.
Conversation is the main activity	Conversation is the main activity.
Accessible	They are physically and socially accessible places.
Regulars	There are people who regularly visit these places. The regulars shape the social texture of the space.
Low profile	They are places with a simple and low-profile design.
Cheerful mood	Conversation and games create a fun environment. They are places with a cheerful mood.
Homes Away from Home	People experience a feeling of comfort and warmth. They feel cozy and comfortable just like at home.

**Figure 1.** Characteristics of third places. Taştan, H., & Polatoğlu, Ç. (2023). Rethinking the third place: Could the book cafe be the social interaction catalyst for today's people? *Megaron*, 18(3), 275–286. <https://doi.org/10.14744/megaron.2023.80588>

### 2.1.1 The problem of the lack of third places

During the last decades, new neighborhoods have been designed in isolation from informal public spaces, in what we call “residential areas”. Turning the lives of many into the monotony of commuting to work and then back home, “a two-stop model of daily routine (...) as the urban environment affords less opportunity for public relaxation.” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 9) Due to long commuting distances, traffic jam and exhausting working hours, leisure activities outside of home have been left to many to a weekend plan, like visiting malls or restaurants. Meanwhile, weekday leisure activities have been brought to our private space, like watching series, movies, playing video games, or training at home.

As a consequence, informal social interactions have declined. People engage in fewer casual conversations, often suppressing the stress and concerns accumulated throughout the week until the weekend (Klinenberg, 2018). As Oldenburg (1999) accurately observed, “our urban environment is like an engine that runs hot because it was designed without a cooling system” (p. 10). At the same time, modern entertainment trends may be contributing to a rise in living expenses, as people increasingly invest in consumer electronics such as PlayStation consoles, coffee machines, and home exercise equipment—purchases that can be significantly more costly than simply spending time at a park or going out for coffee.

*“In the absence of an informal public life, living becomes more expensive. Where the means and facilities for relaxation and leisure are not publicly shared, they become the objects of private ownership and consumption.” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 10)*

Another consequence of the lack of third places is that when neighborhoods don’t provide them, people compensate for this “lack of socializing” in their working hours by taking

more extended time-outs. Therefore, working hours become longer and there is less time for informal interactions outside work and at home.

On top of that, due to economical interests, fewer parks are built, and more malls keep appearing where consumption advertisements are all over the place. It's beneficial for parents, as malls are relatively safe and pleasant meeting places; so, they practically leave their children alone in shopping centers, like a daycare for adolescents and teenagers. As a consequence, there is an entire generation that may have known the park as children, but who grew up in the shopping center (Díaz-Albertini, 2016). In this regard, there has been a transformation from “citizens” to “consumers”, from the civic square to the commercial "plaza" and in this process, people's inequalities become more evident and profound (Ludeña, 2011), reducing most of the pleasures of a city to the act of consuming (Oldenburg, 1999).

In addition to this, the problem with the growing industry of fast food places, as these places are designed for consumption and not for relaxation or talking. Many of these places don't even have chairs where to sit, and the concept is rapid customer flow. Everything in the design contributes to a hostile experience: the strong colors in the walls, music with a fast tempo, and no comfortable furniture. All with the purpose to push you out faster, aligning to people's speed of life and contributing to keeping the high levels of speed, but at the same time shortening the moments of interaction, talking, and relaxing.

All the previously mentioned bring us to a crisis of place, what Oldenburg defines as “nonplace”, which are places where people are only perceived as customers, clients, or patients. In nonplaces, our character and individuality are irrelevant, while in “real places”, the human being is a person (Oldenburg, 1999). As a result, when public informal life is diminished, society shifts its expectations entirely onto the work and private spheres in an attempt to compensate for its absence. This imbalance contributes to a broader crisis of community engagement, undermining social sustainability (Goosen & Cilliers, 2020) and negatively impacting citizens' quality of life (Jeffres et al., 2009).

On the contrary, countries that prioritize the development of inclusive third places often see lower crime rates, stronger community engagement, and increased quality of life. However, the rise of privatization and digital interaction threatens these spaces, making it more crucial than ever for urban planners, designers, and policymakers to advocate for their preservation and expansion.

Cities like Copenhagen, Medellín, and Tokyo have successfully integrated third place concepts into urban planning by investing in ensuring the livability of their cities with walkable public spaces, co-working hubs, and cultural centers. And authors like McArthur and White prove that social media can act as virtual third place for social interaction which can resemble, yet differ from, traditional physical spaces like bars or clubs and suggesting the potential for continued thinking about the role of third places in developing connectivity online” (2016).

### **2.1.2 Livable Cities**

Third Places play a key role in the strategy cities need to build in order to thrive. As defined by the sociologist and designer from Italy, Ezio Manzini, a livable city is one that prioritizes proximity, social interaction, and care; creating an urban environment that promotes connections between people and their surroundings in a sustainable and meaningful way (2022).

According to the author, the success of a city depends on the amount of social interaction offering citizens continuous opportunities for encounters and at the same time reasons to start conversations, therefore increasing the probabilities for citizens to build common projects and, as a consequence, care more about the other. He states that by promoting proximity, we are creating more understanding about “the other” and therefore more compassion and empathy, which are values that individualistic societies are losing as a result of territorial specialization of activities and services, like having an industrial zone, a

business district, a residential area, etc. Hence, people have to continuously move between one specialized area and another, which results in a city of continuous mobility where people spend long hours commuting from one place to another, and distances between citizens make them more isolated (Mazini, 2022). Plus, being inserted in a capitalistic system that encourages self-interest, competition, and private ownership creates the atmosphere for what the author calls “intrinsically careless cities”, where positive values associated with collaboration are challenging to be physically designed. For this reason, Manzini, in his book, encourages decision makers and citizens to design the conditions to make collaboration more likely to happen.

However, Bruno Latour, a French philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist, mentions that an outcome of proximity could be also negative encounters (Latour,2005); which is why it is so important to design spaces that enable positive encounters for eye and body contact, where the voice can be clearly heard. Manzini mentions streets, squares, cafés, shops, and public parks as places of positive encounters and lists the most suitable according to the degree of relativity with the person: “the stairway landing for the neighbor, the table of a café for a friend, the street for a stranger” (2022, p.63). This highlights the relevance of third places in cities as enablers of encounters and triggers of collaboration.

But, how to measure or know if a city is accomplishing its goal of being livable? Oldenburg says that the best way to know if a city is providing its population with an engaging informal public life is by observing the streets, sidewalks, parks, squares, parkways, and boulevards are being used by people sitting, standing, and walking (Oldenburg, 1999).

### **2.1.3 Third places and gender**

Although Third Places have often been described as inclusive and democratic, if we look closer, we will find persistent inequalities in women’s access and participation. Let’s start

with the notion that the “public sphere,” as defined by Habermas (1991), refers to a domain of social life where citizens can debate and discuss matters of shared concern. However, this space has traditionally been dominated by men, often excluding or marginalizing women (Yassein, 2024).

To add more, women's leisure opportunities have been shaped by visible and invisible constraints. Brown et al. (2001) in their study about mothers and leisure, point out that women's participation in leisure and public life has often been dictated by responsibilities related to housework and family. Green et al. (1990) in their book “Women's leisure, what leisure?” add that during the early 20th century, women’s public activities, such as dancing or attending church, were limited by societal norms and often required male chaperones to maintain respectability.

Also, third places have historically been gender unequal. Elizabeth Roberts (1984) in her research “Women’s Place” emphasized that public venues like pubs were generally male spaces, where only a few older or bolder women would dare to go. In contrast, religion was one domain where women outnumbered men in the public sphere (Green et al., 1990). Gerda Werkele (1980), philosopher, mentions in her essay “Women in Urban society” that women were often perceived as ‘out of place’ in urban public spaces like cafes. Some women expressed a complete lack of third places in interviews run for Oldenburg’s study, stating, “A third place! God! I don’t even have a second place!” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 220).

Rysman (as cited in Fullagar et al., 2018) argued that patriarchal societies view female solidarity with suspicion, associating it with rebellion or gossip; therefore, they didn’t want them around their male informal public gatherings or even let women be together. This perception is further reinforced by media and advertising, which frequently sexualize women and present them as objects of visual consumption in third places, rather than humans with equal rights (Rosewarne, 2005).

With time, new alternatives of third places appeared that were friendly for both genders. By the 1920s, more family-oriented activities like going to the cinema began to offer new forms of leisure that included both genders (Roberts, 1984). And, as technology entered

the home—like radios and gramophones—the home itself became a site of leisure. (Green et al., 1990). Oldenburg (1999) also observed that as more men and women entered coeducational colleges, gender integration in social spaces increased. Yet, he also noted that women’s third places often included their children, limiting the freedom and spontaneity typical of male-dominated third places.

Despite the efforts, some barriers have prevailed in bars and similar venues, remaining male-dominated, with women facing fears related to safety, harassment, and social stigma (Bird & Sokolofski, 2005; Fullagar et al., 2018). Poor urban design, like inadequate lighting and lack of secure transportation, exacerbates these fears and limits women’s participation in nighttime social economies (Fullagar et al., 2018). Cost is another barrier, as women are less likely to have disposable income and are more conscious of household budgets. Mothers, in particular, face additional barriers, such as navigating urban infrastructure with prams or facing public scrutiny while breastfeeding (Boyer & Spinney, 2016; Lugosi, 2012; Boyer, 2012).

Wearing (1995), highlighted that if women do not see the city as a viable leisure space, they are unlikely to participate in its transformation into a community resource. Aligning with this, Oldenburg and Brissett, in 1982, had previously stressed the importance of designing third places that are truly inclusive, suggesting practical features like pram access, breastfeeding zones, and diaper-changing facilities.

## **2.2 The relevance of Third Place and emerging forms**

As society evolves, so do our ways of connecting and gathering. In this chapter, I will describe the evolution of third place in recent years and the new emerging formats. The traditional concept of the third place—as a casual, neutral space for social interaction—has undergone significant transformations in response to changes in technology, economy, public health crises, and shifting social needs. From the rise of hyperconnectivity and its paradoxes, to a growing epidemic of loneliness, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, these forces have redefined how and where people seek connection. The present

section explores these shifts and introduces new formats of third places that have emerged as responses to today's complex social landscape.

### **2.2.1 Hyperconnectivity Era**

Advances in digital technology, the internet, and mobile communication give us a sense of constant connection with people. Sherry Turkle, a professor of Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and a well-known sociologist and psychologist, has done extensive research on how humans interact with technology, particularly focusing on how digital communication affects relationships, identity, and empathy. Her book *Alone Together* (2011) explores how constant digital connectivity, especially through smartphones, social media, and AI, has paradoxically led to greater feelings of isolation and emotional disconnection, despite being more "connected" than ever. She states in her book that we are lonely, but at the same time, we fear being intimate; therefore, we would rather text than talk. (Turkle, 2011)

We will think that technology enabling messages and video calls has approached human interactions. However, most of our answers in WhatsApp are emoticons or rapid responses rather than reflections, or video calls, where we multitask – while we just show our face, we message someone else, or we scroll on social media. Or what Sherry Turkle calls the “Modern Goldilocks” who are people in touch with a lot of people on social media whom they also keep at bay. (Turkle, 2011, p.15)

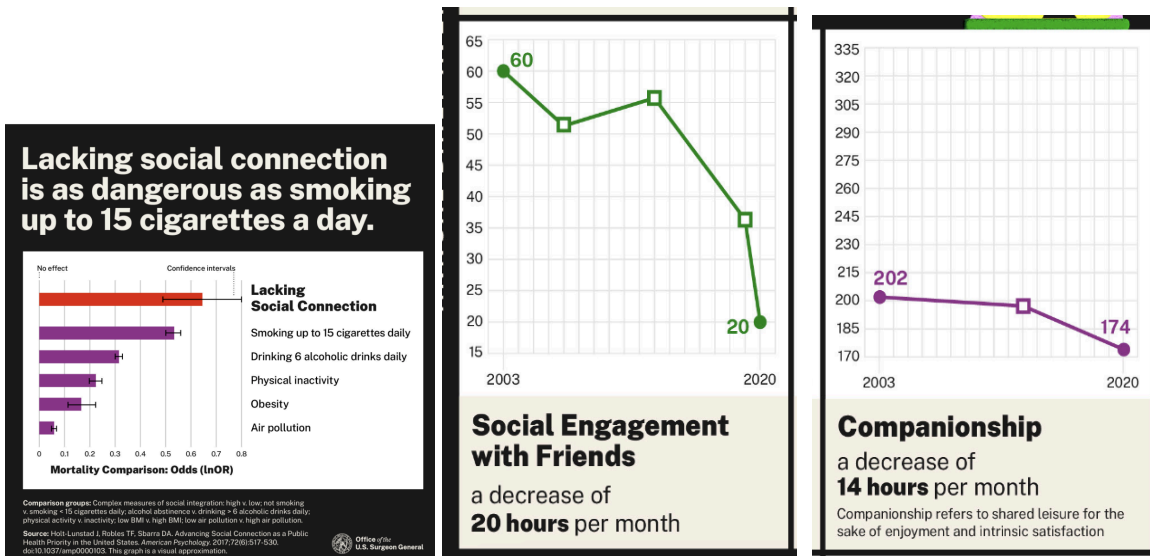
In addition to this “apparent connection”, there is what is called the Metaverse, where people design their avatars, an ideal version of themselves, and build their virtual houses, families, and social life. As a once coworker from Lima said to me, “I have no money to buy a house and all the decoration from well-known designers I would love to acquire. But in this game, buying a house is cheap, and also buying the elements for decoration. I can sell or exchange what I have bought with other players. I even have neighbors I talk with virtually... is fun.”

In this way, technology is not only offering “apparent connections” and alternative lives, but also artificial emotional support. Nowadays, we turn to Chat GPT when we feel bad and want to talk to someone about our problems. It doesn’t judge, provides compassion, and if you want it, can also give you suggestions on how to overcome it. “What if ‘relating’ to robots makes us feel ‘good’ or ‘better’ simply because we feel more in control?” (Turkle, 2011, p. 6) Getting emotional support from AI is easier than physically approaching someone, but what will never occur is the relatability you can get from a human and the physical support a person could provide. Unlike robots, humans are born, have families, and know what losing someone means; they are shaped by history, biology, traumas, and joy, which provide them with experiences to share.

In sum, while the Hyperconnectivity Era offers unprecedented ways to stay digitally linked, the illusion of closeness through screens, avatars, and AI may offer temporary emotional comfort, yet it lacks the unpredictability and empathy that define real human interactions. As Turkle (2011) highlights, this shift toward technologically mediated communication may be making us more isolated, less reflective, and less emotionally attuned to one another.

### **2.2.2 The epidemic of loneliness and social isolation**

In an increasingly connected world, a paradoxical crisis is silently affecting society: social isolation. Dr. Bell Washington defines isolation as “Not having a fulfilling quality relationship” (Berg, 2023). What he means is that you can be surrounded by people but still feel socially isolated if they don’t feel safe to approach them. Currently, social isolation is considered one of the top 3 health concerns, next to obesity and smoking. In the surgeon general’s report on the epidemic of loneliness and isolation was mentioned that “the adverse effects of isolation are greater than those of smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023)



**Figure 3.** Statistics related to the loneliness and isolation epidemic. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2023). *Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community.*

According to Dr. DeLong, the effects of social isolation and loneliness are many starting by 25% increase risk in health issues like anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation; 29% increased risk of heart diseases; 32% increased risk of strokes; 50% increased risk of dementia, and increased risk of obesity and diabetes, high blood pressure, premature death, immune system weakening and susceptibility to various infections (Berg, 2023).

Social isolation is a wicked problem that needs to be tackled from different angles, starting from something as basic as a hearing aid and body mobility, as Dr. Clark states. (Berg, 2023) That is to say, talking and moving; hence, he recommends finding new leisure activities that bring joy and meaningful connections: a book club, painting class, gym, or YMCA. In other words, as Dr. Bell Washington said, “If you want to feel more connected, you need to start with that intention and go to community groups.”(Berg, 2023)

Moreover, isolation is highly correlated with developing addictions. In 1970, the American psychologist Dr Bruce Alexander did an experiment, “The Rat Park”, to better understand addictive behaviors. Studies had previously shown that when rats were isolated in a cage

with no social interaction and given a choice between two water bottles—one with plain water and the other containing heroin or cocaine—they consistently chose the drug-laced water, eventually overdosing and dying. So Bruce questioned whether this was about the drug or it was related to the setting they were in? (Sederer, 2019). To validate this, he put the rats in a sort of park, environments where they could interact, move freely, play, mate, and have sexual encounters. These rats had the same access to two water bottles: one with plain water and the other laced with drugs. Interestingly, in this social and stimulating setting, the rats preferred the plain water. Even when they did try the drug-laced water, their use was occasional and controlled, with no cases of overdose. The presence of a supportive community proved stronger than that of drugs (Sederer, 2019). This is explained by the fact that rats that have a community environment don't want to miss out on it, and drugs represent being mentally absent from the activities, mates, and things occurring around .

Said this, in 2001, the Portuguese government decided to bring this experiment to reality by depenalizing drug consumption. For years, Portugal had punished drug consumption as a crime, drug users could face jail time, criminal records, and the associated social stigma that marginalized and isolated them. However, this method hasn't been fruitful, as by 1999, 1% of Portuguese society was consuming heroin (Watson, 2015). The depenalization came with a plan of treatment and reintegration to society, to strengthen their relationship bonds and prevent them from relapsing into drug use.

The information shared shows how important friendships and community are for both personal and group well-being. Places that encourage bonding, shared experiences, and a sense of belonging are not just nice to have; they are essential infrastructures for public health. In an era of a growing epidemic of loneliness and isolation, intentionally designing spaces that promote community building is not only a preventative measure but a powerful tool for healing and resilience.

### 2.2.3 Post-pandemic Legacy

COVID-19 pandemic is the best example of massive social isolation, most countries experienced strict lockdowns lasting between 2 to 6 months in 2020. During the pandemic period occurred a phenomenon that Manzini calls “everything at/from home” (2022), which means you have all your needs covered in the comfort of your home; therefore, no need to go out of it. The pandemic highly increased the usage of delivery Apps, home entertainment devices, and online meeting platforms. People not only brought their offices and schools home, but also their workout places (yoga mats, treadmill, weights). People bought bigger TVs and BBQ grills for their patios, pushing individualization to the extreme, enclosed in their private bubble. As the anthropologist Guilia Balestra wrote, “as our second and third places slowly became smaller and smaller, our first place had to accommodate more than what it had been used and designed for” (2020).

Manzini describes the emerging city of “everything at/from home” as a non-city of self-confined individuals in isolation in their homes, a social desert of an aggregate of individuals without communities, without common goods, and without place, who for reasons of convenience, could continue to live this way even when it is no longer an obligation (2022). Even when the restrictions were lifted, the fear and the routine made people continue maintaining their distances.

Curiously, COVID-19 has shown that the strongest cities are those constructed on a web of communities rooted in the places where they live (Manzini, 2022). When disasters happen, the strongest and best-structured communities are better at responding and figuring out what to do, even without guidance from authorities. For example, a tennis club could turn into a rescue center, with its members working together because they already know and trust each other.

Likewise, technology if used well, can actually bring people closer instead of pushing them apart, like to help organize local meetups that might not happen otherwise. For example, neighbors who don't usually interact can use an app to plan a soccer game, a

community event, or even help someone in need. This mix of online coordination and real-world activities helps build stronger communities that are connected both digitally and physically. (Manzini, 2022)

In 2023, as a legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept Hybrid Third Place was created. The authors describe it as a place where people are not only talking, but also working, learning, participating in workshops, connecting online, or engaging with a community. It represents a place where the blending of digital and physical interactions is possible. (Taştan & Polatoğlu, 2023) These are the main characteristics of these new places:

1. Blends public and private – Allows personal space within public areas.
2. Multi-purpose comfort – Feels like home or office, for both relaxing and working.
3. Activity mix – Not centered on conversation; supports varied activities.
4. Layered interactions – Offers different levels of social connection and privacy.
5. Designed appeal – Often stylish or curated to attract diverse users.
6. Flexible and engaging – Adaptable, invites repeat visits, sparks curiosity.
7. Consumption-based socializing – Combines buying with bonding.

In conclusion, the post-pandemic legacy highlights a shift toward increased individualization and privatization, as people adapted to the "everything at/from home" model. This led to isolation and the decline of public spaces. However, the pandemic also emphasized the strength of community-based connections, crucial for resilience during crises, and the Hybrid Third Place concept emerged as a solution, blending digital and physical interactions in multi-purpose, flexible spaces.

#### **2.2.4 Emerging forms of third place**

In response to the arising context, new characteristics have emerged in the third place industry, which I have categorized into five:

1. More consciously healthy options as a result from a desire for intentional healthy

social experiences, formats like The Offline Club in Barcelona promoting digital detox and mindfulness through shared analogue activities (board games, knitting, reading, painting, etc) Similarly, Kava bars in the U.S. introduce a natural, relaxing beverage as a social alternative to alcohol, and coffee raves transform cafes into daytime party spots with a sober, upbeat energy. These new formats prioritize mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing—signaling a cultural move away from traditional consumption-driven spaces toward more healthy conscious-driven forms of community.

2. A second category of these emerging places focuses on reclaiming underused public spaces. From DJ sets in London’s train wagons, to ping-pong nights in Berlin’s empty markets, to urban gardens bringing neighbors together. These third place interventions reimagine overlooked places as opportunities for connection. Even traditional infrastructure like Estación Francia in Barcelona is being adapted to host pop-up events, reinforcing the idea that social infrastructure can be flexible, fun, and community-driven.
3. The rise of animal-centered spaces that foster emotional connection and well-being through petting and interaction. From Puppy Yoga sessions in San Francisco to cat cafés in Dubai and a variety of animal cafés across Japan — including owl, snake, and capybara cafés — these venues offer relaxation and companionship, where people can unwind, reduce stress, and bond with animals. Especially in urban environments, they offer a therapeutic alternative to traditional social settings, reflecting a deeper societal desire for connection, playfulness, and emotional care. However, the ethics of such experiences are also debated, as concerns about animal welfare, stress, and proper living conditions raise important questions regarding the balance between human enjoyment and animal rights (Thai PBS World, 2024).
4. Co-creation hubs like open libraries, repair cafés, and fab labs (Fabrication

Laboratories). They promote peer-to-peer informal knowledge exchange, skill sharing, and learning by doing. These spaces encourage social interaction, networking, and trust-building among diverse users. Providing shared tools, materials, or knowledge—whether it's books, machines, or expertise. Users are not just consumers but contributors—repairers, makers, teachers, learners. A good example is Helsinki's central library, Oodi, where people can freely enter 24/7 and access not only books but CDs, magazines, board games, instrument rental, and all kinds of facilities for 3D printing, sewing, karaoke, recording labs, etc. Another example is the city of Berlin, which hosts most of the repair cafes where people go to fix their artifacts, borrow tools, and collaborate in the process of repairing. Regarding Fab Labs, UK cities started implementing them after the 2008 financial crash, as a way to upskill the residents, but according to Bogue and Ouillon study, Fab labs “go beyond providing access to digital fabrication tools, and function as ‘third places’ as they enhance social connectedness” (2023).

5. Physical and digital blend experiences to promote proximity and social bonding in creative ways. Like Timeleft, that by using a personality-based algorithm to match strangers for weekly dinners, the platform makes it easy to meet new people and have engaging conversations in real life.

These trends show that third places are not disappearing—they are being reimagined in diverse, creative, and responsive ways. Today's third places aim to balance solitude and sociability, tradition and innovation, digital and physical, human and more-than-human (plants and animals). In doing so, they reflect people's needs for belonging and interacting in an era marked by social fragmentation and digital saturation.

### **2.3 Lima City context**

Lima, the capital city of Peru, is located along the Pacific coast. After Cairo, Lima is the second-largest desert city in the world with 10 million people in average. Founded in 1535

by Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro, it became the center of Spanish colonial rule in South America and quickly grew into one of the region's most important cities. Lima, like many other modern metropolises, has been affected by issues such as rapid population growth and unplanned urban expansion.

In the late 20th century, Lima experienced a massive wave of rural-urban migration, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. This migration was driven by political instability, economic challenges, and violence linked to the internal conflict between the government and insurgent groups like “Sendero Luminoso”. This amount of people coming to the city for better opportunities led to the rapid growth of informal settlements, known as "pueblos jóvenes" or "young towns," which lack adequate infrastructure and urban planning.

As Lima's population grew, the city expanded without proper control. Today, Lima is home to one-third of the country's population, making it one of the largest cities in South America. It is an economic and cultural hub, with a growing service sector, tourism, and a strong culinary scene. By 2020, Peru had become one of the main destinations for Venezuelan migrants in Latin America, with Lima hosting the largest population of Venezuelans in the country, 1.1 million. The lack of growth strategies has led to intensified persistent issues as insecurity, traffic congestion, air pollution, and inadequate public transportation. These challenges, along with the lack of green spaces, have raised concerns about the city's livability and quality of life for its residents. According to the metropolitan green space inventory, Lima City has only 2.71 m<sup>2</sup> of green space per inhabitant—well below the World Health Organization's recommendation of 8 m<sup>2</sup> per inhabitant (Romero, 2017). A significant contributing factor is the lack of a strong legal framework adapted to the realities of each municipality, which limits the creation of public policies improve residents' quality of life (Borkowski et al., 2019).

Another critical barrier to progress is the deep-rooted issue of political and institutional corruption, which continues to affect urban development and public trust. Over the past decades, numerous city officials and national leaders have been implicated in scandals involving the mismanagement of public funds, bribery, and collusion with private interests.

This widespread corruption weakens municipal capacity, alters urban priorities, and often delays essential infrastructure projects.

Most alarmingly, Lima is currently facing a critical security crisis. In March 2025, the Peruvian government declared a state of emergency in Lima due to a rise in violent crime and extortion. This declaration, recently extended, permits the deployment of military and police forces, granting them additional powers such as conducting searches and arrests without judicial warrants. Also, freedom of movement is restricted through street and highway controls, while public demonstrations require prior authorization, placing significant limitations on civil liberties (Universidad César Vallejo, 2025).

In this context, everyday life in Lima is increasingly shaped by fear and insecurity. Public spaces are underutilized, and many urban developments now depend more on private investment than public initiative. The city's future depends not only on resolving its security and corruption crises but also on reestablishing trust in public institutions and reclaiming urban life for its citizens (Freedom House, 2024).

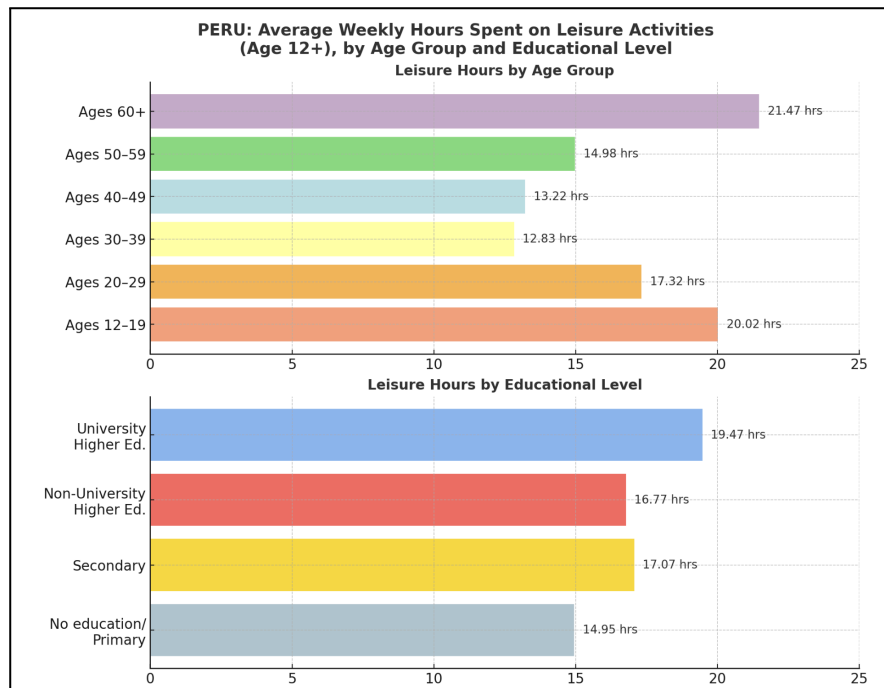
### **2.3.1 Third places in Peru and Lima**

In Lima, people enjoy gatherings, being loud, and laughing. However, this vibrant social culture increasingly struggles against the challenges of modern urban life. Time is scarce, there is insecurity on the streets, long commutes, and demanding work schedules make spontaneous gatherings more difficult. As a result, socializing often becomes formal, scheduled, and infrequent.

The National Institute of Statistics and Informatics of Peru (INEI, 2024) notes that well-being is not only about income or consumption, but also about how freely individuals can use their time. Many Peruvians suffer from what is known as "time poverty": the more time spent on paid or unpaid work, the less time available for rest and leisure. This reality is particularly severe in urban settings like Lima.

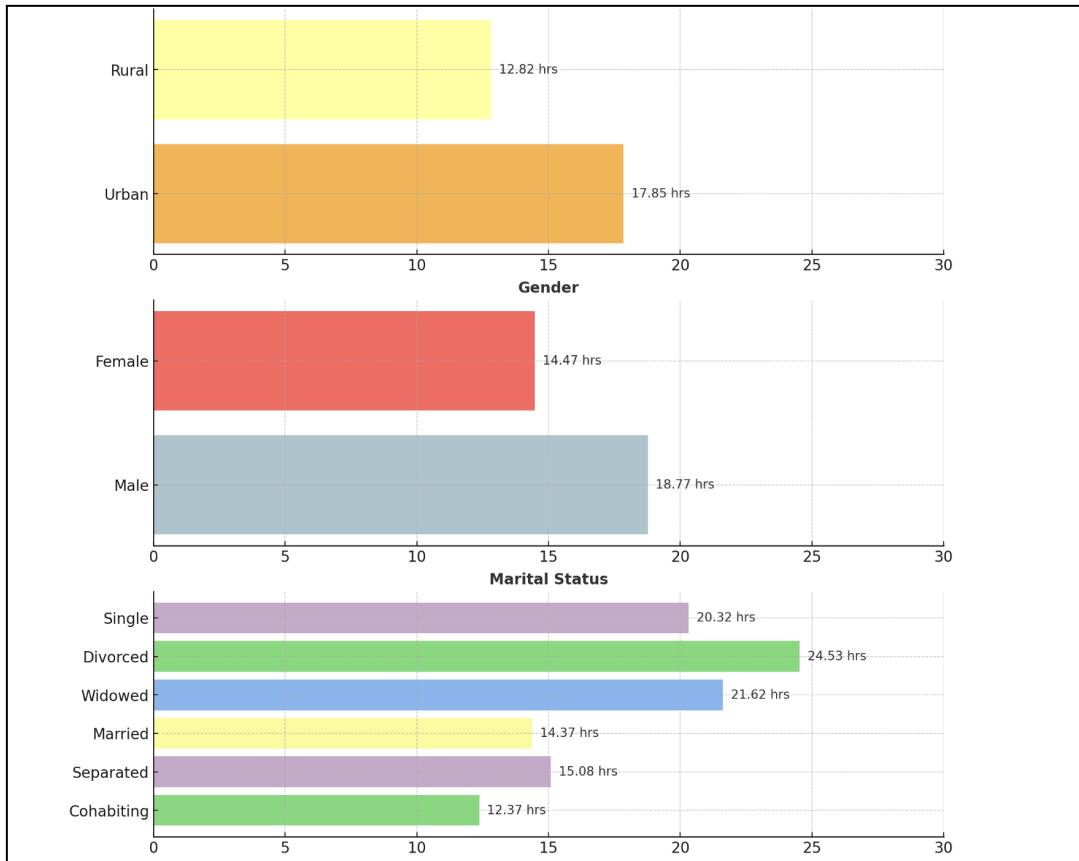
Data from INEI, 2011, reveals national telling trends (see Figure 4 and 5):

- People aged 30–39 spend the least time on leisure activities a week.
- The higher the level of education, the more time is allocated to leisure.
- Urban residents enjoy more leisure time than those in rural areas.
- Men spend 4.3 more hours per week on leisure than women, creating a monthly gap of 17.2 hours.
- Married or cohabiting individuals dedicate less time to leisure than single or divorced people, with the latter reporting the most leisure time.



**Figure 4.** Peru: Average weekly hours spend on leisure activities. Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática. (2011). *Principales resultados de la Encuesta Nacional de Uso del Tiempo 2010.*

[https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones\\_digitales/Est/Lib0960/Libro.pdf](https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib0960/Libro.pdf)

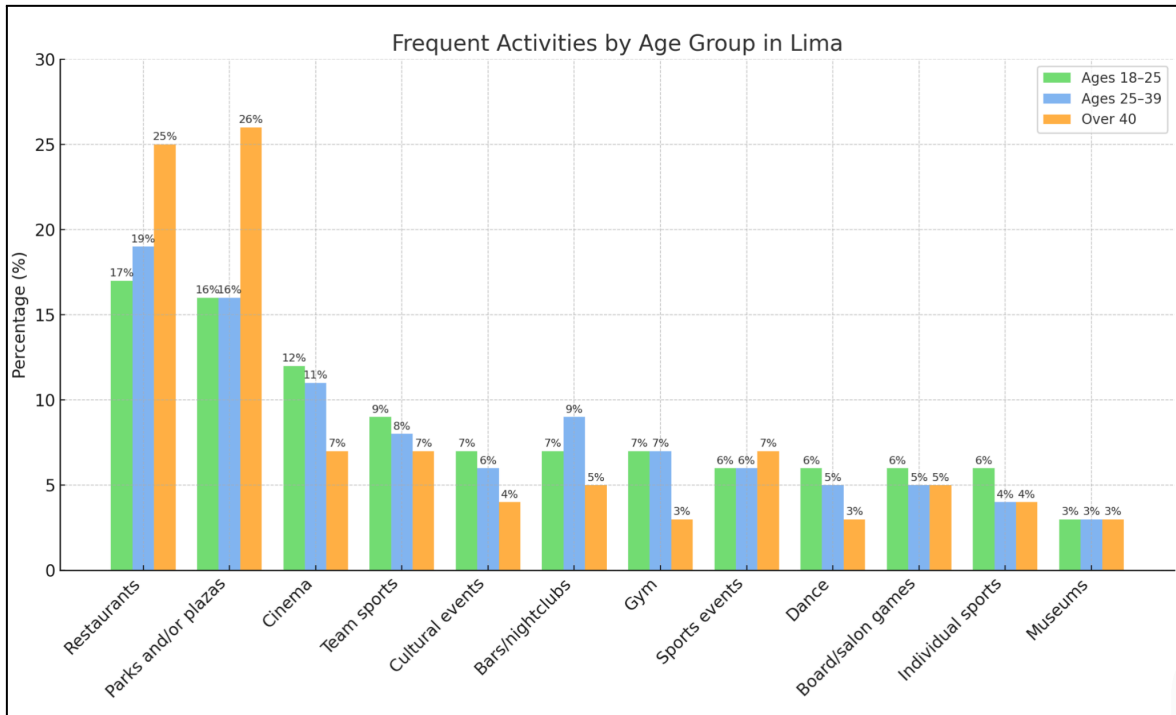


**Figure 5.** Peru: Average weekly hours spend on leisure activities. Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática. (2011). *Principales resultados de la Encuesta Nacional de Uso del Tiempo 2010.*

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In addition to time poverty, 45% of Peruvians see mental health as the country’s primary health issue, and 39% report stress so intense it prevented them from working for a period last year (Ipsos Peru, 2023).

Given this context, where do people go to unwind and reconnect? For many in Lima, the answer is restaurants. Traditionally seen as spaces for sharing and social connection, restaurants have gained even greater significance during the city’s ongoing gastronomic boom. Eating out is now one of the most common leisure activities, followed by visiting parks, cinemas, and participating in group sports (Sánchez, 2022).



**Figure 6.** Frequent Activities by Age Group in Lima. *Sánchez, S. (2022). Actividades culturales y recreativas que realizan los peruanos. Equilibrium Centro para el Desarrollo Económico.*

<https://equilibriumcende.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Actividades-culturales-y-recreativas-que-realizan-los-peruanos.pdf>

Yet another trend is equally significant place are shopping malls. A report by Lima Cómo Vamos (2025) shows that malls are among the most frequently visited leisure spaces. This reflects a global shift toward privately managed public spaces. As Xu and Yang (2008) argue, in a neoliberal climate, investing public funds in civic spaces is often seen as politically undesirable; instead, commercial plazas replace civic ones. Peruvian architect Ludeña (2011) critiques this shift, warning that it transforms citizens into consumers and deepens social inequalities. Sociologist Pablo Vega Centeno (2006) even questions whether malls can be considered public spaces at all, given that their primary role is to promote consumption, not to strengthen citizenship or diversity.

Díaz-Albertini (2016) highlights a growing trend: due to concerns about street safety, many parents choose to leave their children in shopping malls. These spaces have

effectively become informal daycares for teenagers. As a result, an entire generation is growing up within commercial centers rather than in public parks.

In the past 12 months, have you engaged in any of the following activities?	
2024	
Activity	Percentage
Go to a shopping centre	77.7%
Go to parks for a walk	74.7%
Go to the cinema	47.9%
Go to the beach	46.0%
Regularly practise a sport or physical activity	41.8%
Visit a natural or wild area	32.8%
Attend cultural events organised in the street or public squares	29.1%
Go to craft fairs	19.4%
Visit museums / galleries	19.1%
Visit monuments or historical / archaeological sites	19.1%
Go to book fairs	16.6%
Visit the hills (natural reserve areas)	10.4%
Go to the theatre	9.4%

**Figure 7.** Level of Engagement per Activity. Lima Cómo Vamos. (2025). Reporte urbano de percepción ciudadana (14th ed.). <https://www.limacomovamos.org/reportespercepcion>

The connection between public safety and use of public spaces is undeniable (Borkowski et al., 2019), and as public space becomes privatized, the need for genuine third places—safe, accessible, inclusive spaces for gathering—becomes more urgent.

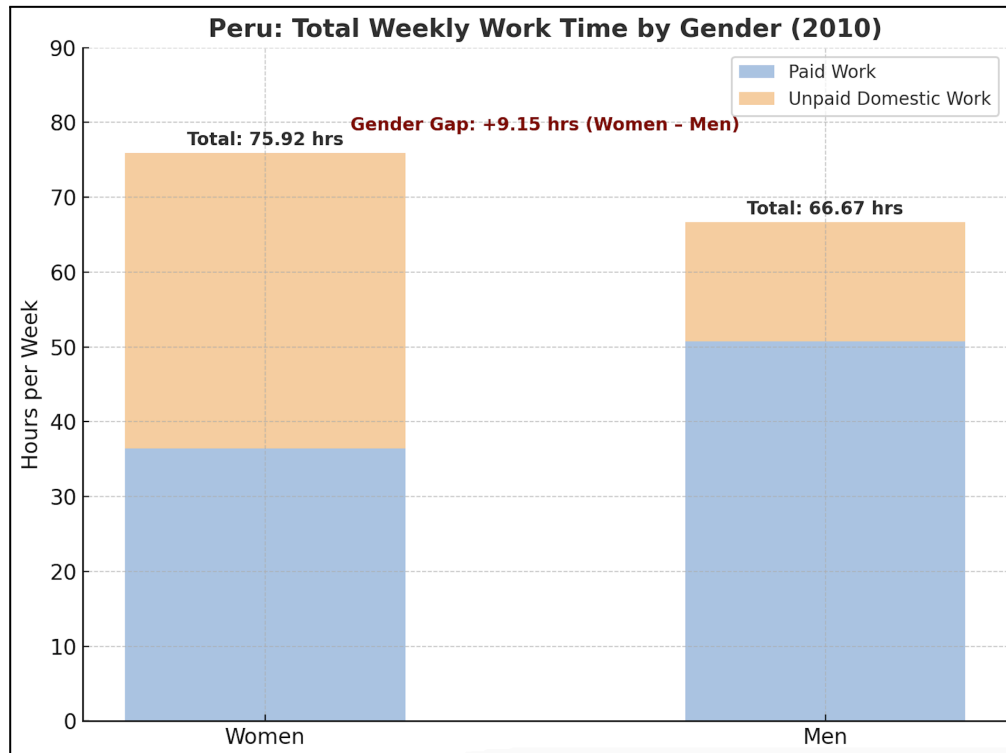
The right to these leisure spaces is recognized in law. Peru’s General Environmental Law (Law 28611) affirms every person’s right to a healthy, balanced environment. Similarly,

the Political Constitution of Peru (1993) guarantees all individuals the right to peace, tranquility, free time, and rest.

### **2.3.3 Gender gap in Peru**

Understanding the gender gap in Peru requires a closer look at how women and men divide their time between paid work, unpaid domestic responsibilities, and leisure. The data reveals systemic inequalities that affect women's opportunities, well-being, and safety. In the following lines, I will explore three principal aspects: work disparities, leisure time, and public safety.

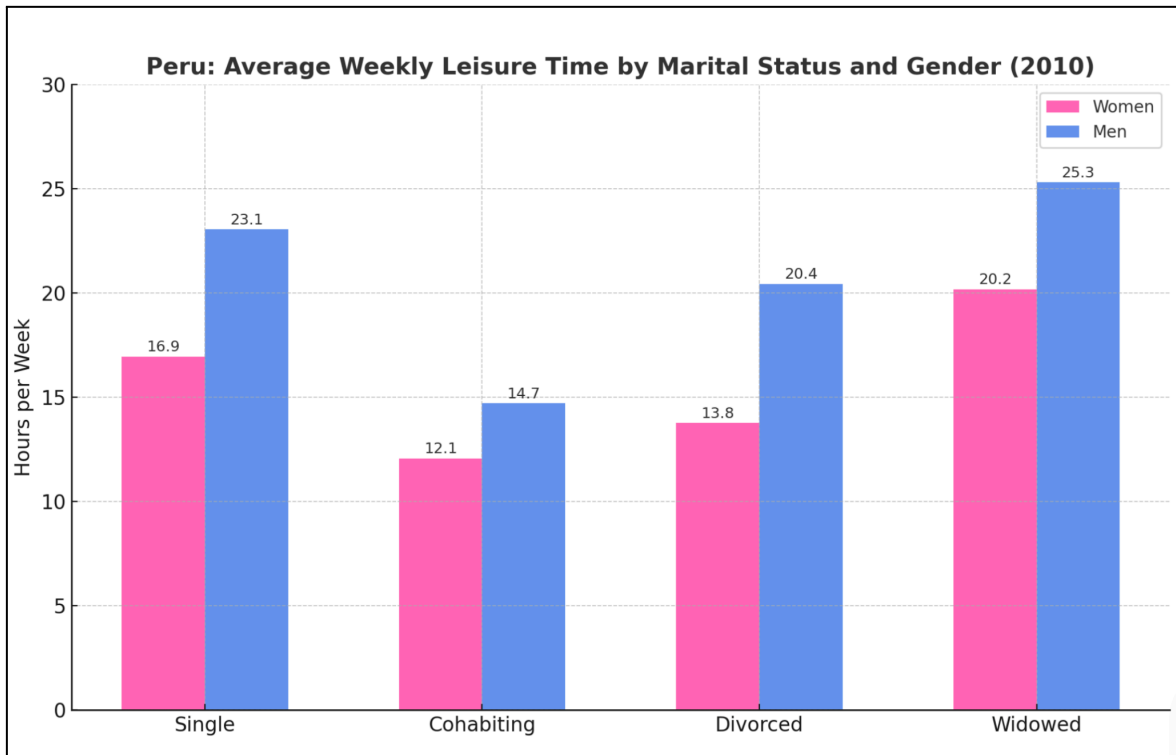
Peruvian women work 9 hours and 15 minutes of paid and unpaid work per week, more than men (INEI, 2024). This difference is mainly due to the time women spend on unpaid domestic work, often referred to as invisible work because it goes unrecognised and uncompensated. While men spend about 15 hours and 54 minutes per week on unpaid tasks, women spend 39 hours and 28 minutes, which is 23 hours and 34 minutes more than men. On the other hand, men spend more time than women on paid work, with a difference of 14 hours and 19 minutes more than women (INEI, 2024).



**Figure 8.** Peru: Total Weekly Work Time by Gender (2010). Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática. (2011). *Principales resultados de la Encuesta Nacional de Uso del Tiempo 2010.*

[https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones\\_digitaes/Est/Lib0960/Libro.pdf](https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitaes/Est/Lib0960/Libro.pdf)

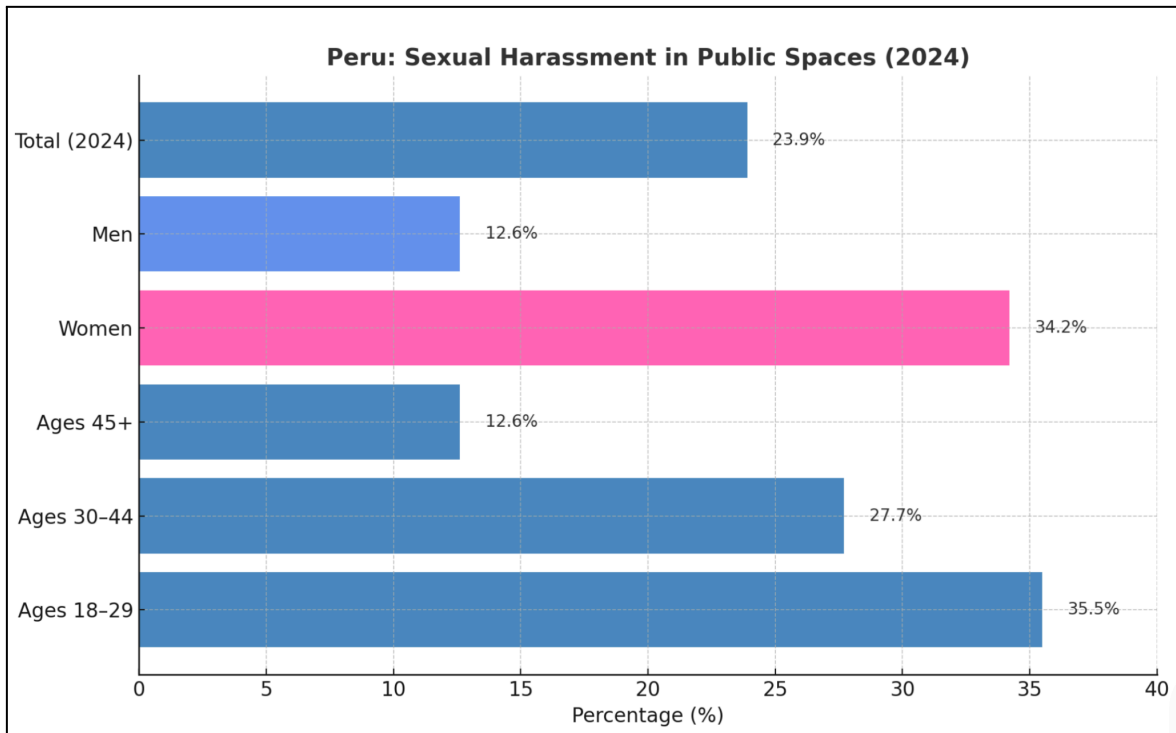
The heavy burden of unpaid domestic work leaves women with less time for rest and recreation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, men spend 4.3 more hours per week on leisure than women, creating a monthly gap of 17.2 hours (INEI, 2011).



**Figure 9.** Peru: Average Weekly Leisure Time by Marital Status and Gender (2010). INEI. (2010). *Encuesta Nacional de Uso del Tiempo 2010*. Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática.

<https://www.mimp.gob.pe/files/direcciones/dgignd/planes/mimdes-inei-encuesta-nacional-uso-tiempo.pdf>

Gender gaps extend beyond work and leisure. They are also evident in experiences of violence and harassment in public spaces. In 2024, 34.2% of women in Peru reported experiencing sexual harassment in public spaces, including whistles, vulgar gestures, and uncomfortable stare; this is compared to only 12.6% of men (Lima Cómo Vamos, 2024). Younger women are the most affected (see Figure 10):



**Figure 10.** Peru: Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces (2024). Lima Cómo Vamos. (2025). Reporte urbano de percepción ciudadana (14th ed.). <https://www.limacomovamos.org/reportespercepcion>

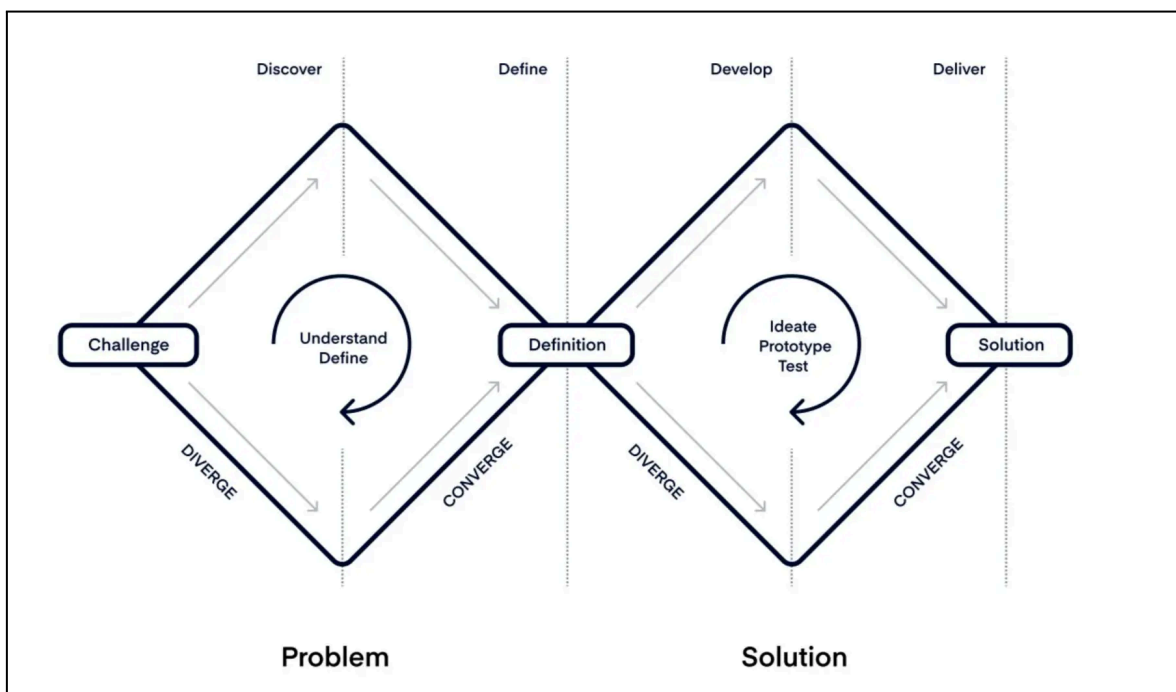
In Peru, the gender gap isn't just one problem, it's a mix of many unfair situations that affect women's everyday lives. To fix this, we need big changes, and one way to tackle it is to reinforce third places as they offer not just a break from daily responsibilities but also a chance to be visible, to be heard, and to build networks.

## 2.4 Service Design and third places

Let's start with the fact that we live in systems; every domain of our life involves different systems. When we talk about services, we are referring to sociotechnical systems that vary in size and complexity; these can range from a small neighborhood shop to a large supermarket, from a local taxi cooperative to a national railway company, or from an

individual caregiver to an entire public healthcare system (Manzini, 2022). Service Design is the framework that allows us to identify the systems and understand the context where design needs to intervene. By involving communities in the design process, Service Design “helps create spaces that not only meet functional requirements but also resonate with the people who use them”(Aricò et al., 2024). According to Manzini, as designers, we need to create “service encounters”, which are interactions between individuals or between people and objects, with the use of specific resources to achieve a meaningful outcome: solving a problem or creating a new opportunity (2022).

The double diamond framework provides a work roadmap for Service Designers to create that meaningful outcome. It is a roadmap that has 2 main phases: understanding the problem/challenge and coming up with a solution, which could be a product, a toolkit, a strategy, a guideline, etc. These 2 phases are composed of 2 moments each, one of exploration where there is uncertainty and divergence about the topic, and the other of convergence where concepts are defined and narrowed down. (See Figure 11)



**Figure 11.** Double Diamond framework. Productboard Editorial. (2022, June 20). *A guide to using the “Double Diamond” framework to score product home runs*. Productboard. <https://www.productboard.com/blog/double-diamond-framework-product-management/>

That said, for designers to work on creating solutions that favor the people and the planet, it is essential to understand the people’s lifestyle, their physical surroundings, how they feel, and what they need. Therefore, Service Design appears as a suitable framework for designing and researching third places as it has at its operating core a humanity-centered design approach.

### 2.4.1 Humanity-centered Design

According to Norman, creator of this approach and director of The Design Lab at University of California, Humanity-centered Design is a practice where designers focus on people’s needs not as individuals but as societies with complex, deep-rooted problems; expanding the scope of traditional Human-centered Design (HCD) to include the ecosystem impact rather than just the human(2024).

Humanity-centered Design is based on 5 main principles, the last one being a game changer in this new approach: (Norman, 2024)

1. Focus on the whole ecosystem, living and nonliving things: people, animals, plants, and the physical environment.
2. Focuses on solving the root cause of the problem, not just the symptom.
3. Think long-term and consider how today’s actions might affect communities and nature far into the future
4. Constant iteration: testing and refining the proposed designs to ensure they truly meet the needs of the people and ecosystem.
5. Work with communities, not for them. This is very important, because the people who are living the problem often know the best solutions — they just need help to

make them real. Also, when solutions come from the community, they're more likely to be accepted and successful than if it were to come from outsiders.

This last principle perfectly aligns with what Manzini mentions in his book for *Livable Cities*, which highlights the need to design services with society:

“[...]we need to shift from the service society that we knew to a society in which services, instead of pushing people to feel and act like passive customers, support their ability to be active, to collaborate, to produce common goods and care for each other and the planet.” (Manzini, 2022, p.92)

#### **2.4.2 Placemaking**

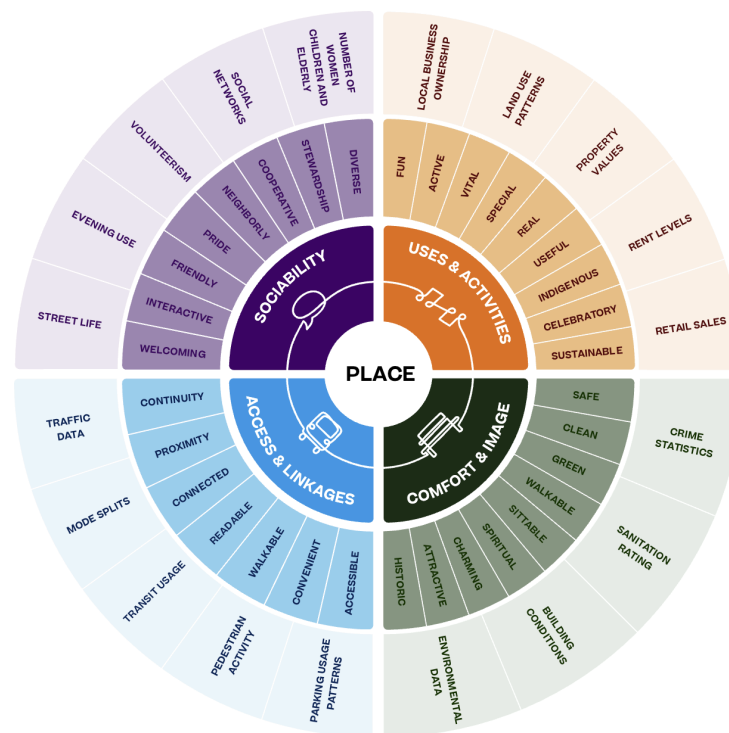
One way to apply Service Design to create places is through the “Placemaking” model, a way of shaping spaces to create experiences in, of, and for people (Hes et al., 2019) Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent spaces strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, in a collaborative process by which people can shape those places to maximize shared value. (Project for Public Spaces, 2022)

This way of creating places questions the rigid and vertical way of doing services, where the ideas come from the top, instead of bottom-up. As the process signaled by Project Public Spaces, Placemaking, follows Service Design framework and Humanity-centered approach:

“It is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole. With this knowledge, we can come together to create a common vision for that place.”(Project for Public Spaces, 2022, p.19 )

Placemaking is the model to design meaningful places through Service Design framework to avoid creating nonplaces; like, little-used parks, empty cafes, or libraries. According to Project for Public Space, creating a Great Place is very simple, there are four key attributes that all these great places share (see Figure 12):

1. They are easy to reach and linked to other key places nearby.
2. They feel pleasant and look inviting.
3. They offer activities that attract people.
4. They are friendly spaces where people enjoy spending time and want to come back often.



**Figure 12.** What Makes a Great Place? Project for Public Spaces. (2022). *Community gathering space*. In *Placemaking: What if we built our cities around places?* Project for Public Spaces.

[https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5810e16fbe876cec6bcb86e/6335ddc88fbf7f29ec537d49\\_2022%20placemaking%20booklet.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5810e16fbe876cec6bcb86e/6335ddc88fbf7f29ec537d49_2022%20placemaking%20booklet.pdf)

In Figure 12, the inner ring shows these 4 attributes, the middle ring points out the characteristics of each of those attributes, and the outer ring indicates how you can measure the impact of those characteristics to monitor the “greatness of a place”. A place-led process is a group activity where local participants feel invested in the resulting place and are more likely to serve as its ambassadors (Project for Public Spaces, 2022).

The Project for Public Spaces’ model for Great Places, 2022, is an actualized version of the values of a Great Place from Oldenburg’s book “The Great Good Place”, 1989, based on new people’s needs and context.

To sum up, Service Design and Placemaking are the best tools to study and create third places because they both focus on people and the systems they live in. Service Design helps us understand the whole picture—how people move, interact, and what they need—so we can design solutions that truly fit into their daily lives. Placemaking, on the other hand, brings people together to shape their own spaces, making them feel more connected and valued. Together, they allow us to create places that are useful and meaningful; instead of top-down decisions, these approaches involve local voices to make places feel truly theirs. They help transform empty or disconnected spaces into vibrant ones where people can meet and feel they belong.

### **2.4.3 Gender- sensitive Design**

Service Design and Placemaking, when applied through a gender-sensitive lens, offer a powerful and complementary approach to designing inclusive and meaningful third places. A gender-sensitive perspective deepens this analysis by making sure solutions address the specific needs of women and other marginalized groups.

Gender sensitive design emerged as a feminist critique of space and planning in the 70s, and the term appeared in the early 2000s. In 2015, Saskia Sassen, a well known Dutch-american sociologist and urban theorist, wrote an article "Built Gendering" in the Harvard Design Magazine (2015), where she discusses how cities are shaped in ways that reflect and reinforce gender norms and defined "gender-sensitive design" as that who recognises that people experience places differently based on gender. On the contrary, a gender neutral approach to city-making often provides better urban design experiences for heterosexual, able-bodied men than it does for women, girls, gender diverse, and other vulnerable people (Sassen, 2015).

Said this, it is important to understand what the gender entails, as is not only about male and female, but non-binary as well:

“Gender is just one of a multitude of interconnected dimensions that form an individual’s identity, and shape how a person is treated in society. Gender is a social and cultural concept that refers to the way a person lives and interacts with the world. It is about social and cultural differences in identity, expression, and experience as a woman, man, or non-binary person. Non-binary is an umbrella term describing gender identities that are not exclusively male or female” (Place Lab, 2021, p.5)

Together, these approaches create third places that are not only functional and engaging but also equitable and empowering. Instead of imposing top-down solutions, they support bottom-up, participatory design processes that account for diverse experiences. In this way, Service Design and Placemaking, through a gender-sensitive perspective, offer the most effective framework for creating inclusive, vibrant, and socially sustainable third places where everyone—especially women—can feel safe, seen, and connected.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1 Research methodology**

To understand the usage and value of Third Places for women in Lima, the research method applied was qualitative as it allows gathering detailed data to explore meanings, ideas, and experiences from people, to understand the “how” and the “why” behind their Third Places choices and usage behaviors. Unlike quantitative methods, to understand the “what” and “how many”, which are useful for measuring and dimensioning those findings.

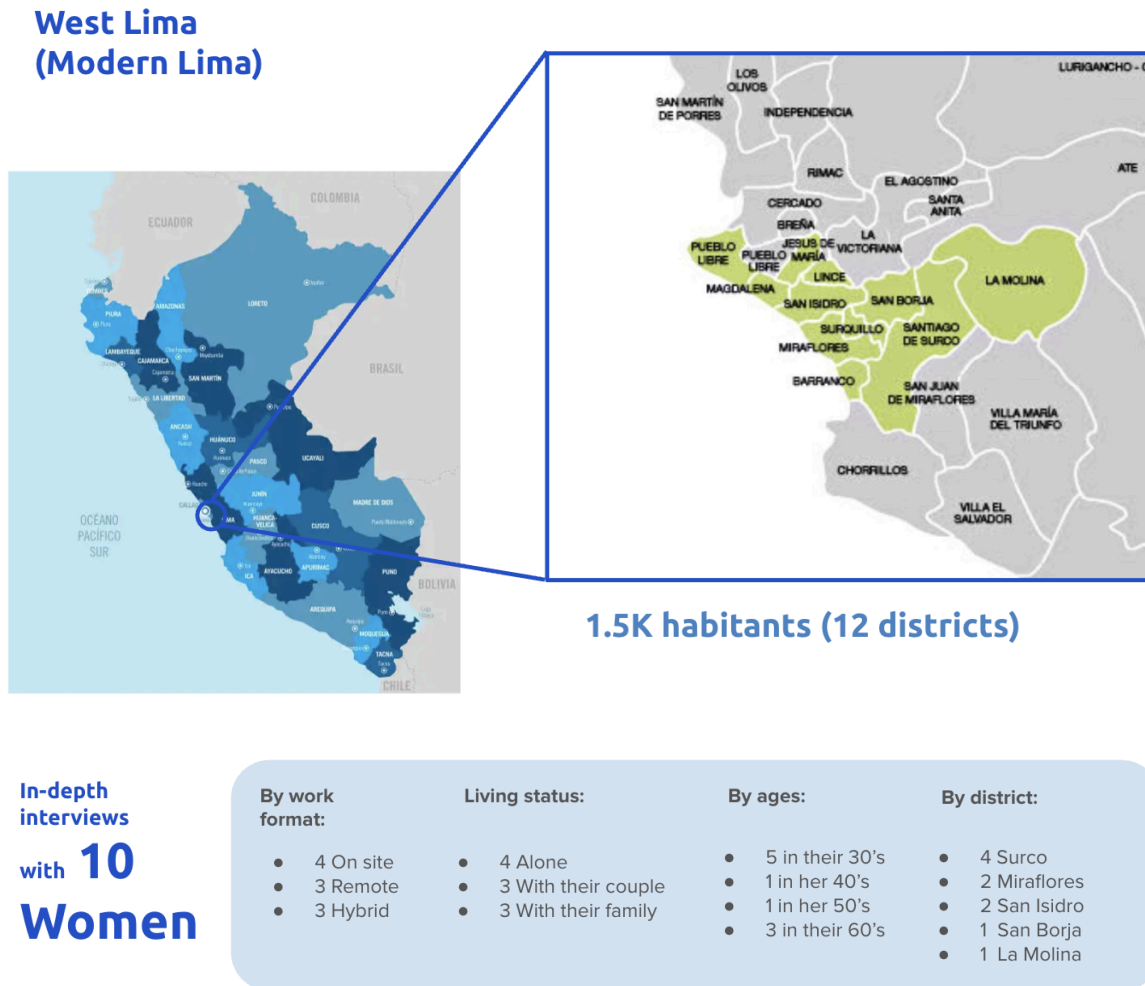
#### **3.2 Research strategy**

The qualitative method was applied from a Service Design Research approach, which uses an ethnographic strategy to collect qualitative data through in-depth interviews, design probes to describe their ideal third place, and journey mapping for the evolution of third place throughout their lives. As in practice, Service Design Research involves methods such as interviews, cultural probes, journey mapping, and ethnographic observation to uncover unmet needs and opportunities for improvement. (Morelli et al., 2020) By focusing on empathy, inclusivity, and sustainability, Service Design Research aims to inspire actionable change, leading to new or improved services, policy proposals, or community initiatives. (Morelli et al., 2020)

#### **3.3 Data collection and analysis methods**

The data was collected through 10 in-depth interviews with women from different age groups: 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s to explore their needs, behaviors, and experiences regarding leisure time and Third Places. These women were all residents of 5 different districts (Santiago de Surco, Miraflores, San Isidro, San Borja, and La Molina) from Modern Lima.

They had different living statuses; 4 lived alone, 3 in a couple, and 2 with their families. Their main activities were diverse: 4 worked on site, 3 at home, and with 3 were hybrid.



**Figure 13.** Sample description. Created by the author.

The interviews were followed by a sketch session with design probes that provided the participants with prompts to spark their imagination to draw or describe their ideal Third Place regarding their current needs. Additionally, the interviewees described their journey in the usage of Third Places throughout their lives, highlighting the different stages according to their age needs, and time context.

Finally, for complementary research, women's interviews were contrasted with 3 interviews with men from different generations (30s, 40s, and 60s) and expanded with 2

other interviews with volunteers from public Third Places. Not only that, but also complemented with secondary sources (books, academic papers, reports, and articles) that illustrated the evolution of the functionality and value of Third Places.

On the one hand, the data gathered from in-depth interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis with the help of digital tools, such as Miroboard and Dovetail, that provided broader visualization and color coding for themes and patterns. On the other hand, the data from secondary sources was analyzed by applying concept analysis, which helped to define and clarify the Third Place theory and its evolution over time.

Feature	Thematic Analysis	Concept Analysis
Goal	Identify themes from data	Define and clarify a concept
Input	Participant narratives (data-driven)	Literature and theoretical sources (concept-driven)
Output	Themes/patterns	Attributes, definitions, model cases
Application	Understanding human experiences and meanings	Refining terms for clearer use in research/theory

**Figure 14.** Thematic Analysis and Concept Analysis Comparative Chart. Created by the author.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations and limitations

This study followed ethical research practice to ensure the dignity, privacy, and voluntary participation of all individuals involved. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their role in it prior to data collection. Verbal consent was obtained during interviews, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the process by excluding personal identifiers and securing audio recordings and notes. Sensitive topics (such as personal routines, emotional well-being, and life transitions) were approached with empathy, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

The creative nature of the design probes and journey mapping required participants to reflect on personal experiences, potentially evoking emotional responses. To mitigate discomfort, participants were guided respectfully and encouraged to share only what they felt comfortable with. Additionally, the inclusion of diverse age groups and life circumstances was designed to foster inclusion and representation.

### **Limitations**

Although this research aimed for diversity in participant demographics, the study focused solely on women residing in five middle- and upper-middle-class districts of Modern Lima (Santiago de Surco, Miraflores, San Isidro, San Borja, and La Molina), potentially limiting generalizability to women from other socioeconomic backgrounds or districts.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Redefining the Third Place model

This chapter traces the evolution of third places from their traditional definitions to the complex, hybrid environments of today, shaped by technological, economic, environmental, social, and cultural shifts.

As explained in the theoretical background, back in the post-industrial era, people's lives were clearly divided into three places: home (the first place), work (the second place), and social spots (the third place). Sociologist Ray Oldenburg described these third places as vital spaces for casual connection and community bonding, to engage with others outside of their family or work roles (Oldenburg, 1999).

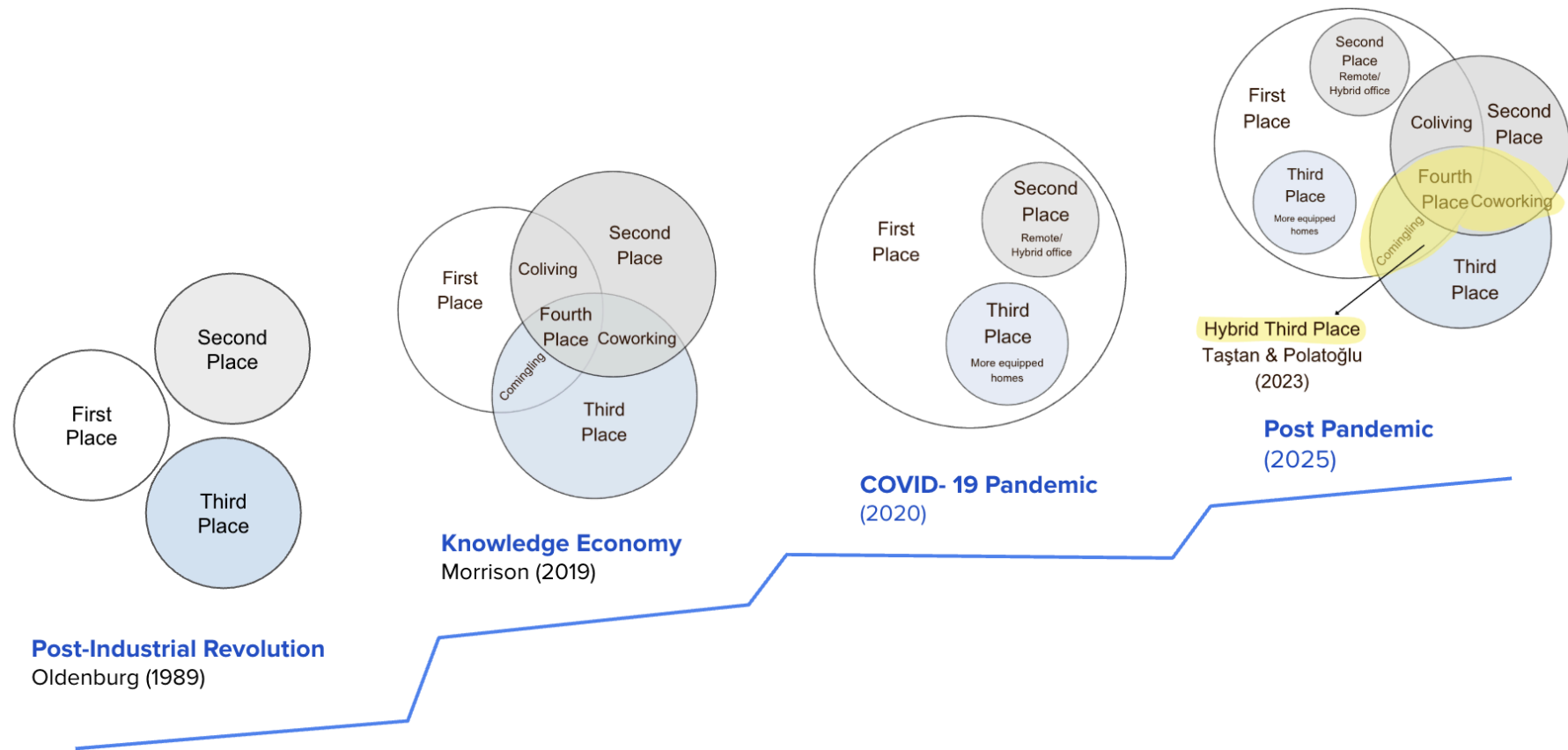
As digital technology advanced and knowledge-based jobs as consultancies, advisories, strategists, researchers, data scientists, etc. became more common, our sense of place started to shift as most of these jobs required creativity, peer collaboration, and could be perfectly done remotely. Therefore, coworking spaces popped up, allowing people to work and network at the same time. Coliving spaces blurred the lines between home and work, mostly for those working abroad. While comminglings blurred the lines between home and community, with the implementation of common areas in buildings like laundries, movie theaters, game areas, pool, barbeque, etc. All these changes led to the creation of "Fourth Places"—spaces that overlap home, work, and social life. (Morrison, 2019) Like Station F in Paris, a 34,000 square-meter innovation center with restaurants, bars, a fablab, 3,046 working desks, more than 100 shared apartments for entrepreneurs and knowledge workers. (<https://stationf.co/>)

COVID-19 pandemic removed all places that involved human interaction with others. As a result, colivings and cominglings reduced their availability and eliminated common areas, or closed. Third places, migrated to online services, delivery, or home devices; affecting those ones who couldn't adapt to the curfew context. Also, homes were transformed; with social places closed and many working remotely, the first place (home) had to serve multiple roles, and they became more connected and equipped for these tasks (remote

offices, gyms at home, coffee machines, and more). As a result, the boundaries between home, work, and social life faded, and the idea of "place" became more about function than location. The home increasingly became the setting for both second and third place activities. Consequently, people invested in better-equipped living spaces, and those with the means opted for larger homes with features like patios or balconies to accommodate this multifunctional lifestyle. (See Figure 15)

In the years following the pandemic, remote work and virtual socializing have become the "new normal." Coworking, coliving, and commingling spaces gradually reopened their common areas and have continued to grow and evolve. Traditional workplaces, such as offices, either reopened, transitioned to coworking arrangements, or maintained remote work models to cut costs. Third places that survived the pandemic also adapted, gradually reopening with hybrid formats. These include features like online menus and ordering systems, free Wi-Fi, and dedicated plug-in areas for working (Crick, 2011). They now support a mix of functions, allowing customers to engage in social, leisure, and work-related activities alongside typical food and beverage services (Rosenbaum et al., 2009). This evolution gave rise to the concept of the Hybrid Third Place—flexible, multifunctional environments where people can connect, relax, and be productive. As Taştan and Polatoğlu (2023, p. 283) explain, "they combine activities such as eating and drinking (café), reading (library), working, leisure, and cultural activities (exhibition, workshop)".

In summary, the evolution of third places reflects the broader transformation of social and spatial life. From clearly separated spheres to blended, hybrid environments, the redefinition of place responds to the complexities of modern life. The progression from Oldenburg to Morrison and the Post-Pandemic legacy marks a shift toward inclusivity, adaptability, and interconnection. The challenge and opportunity lie in designing and supporting spaces that embrace these hybrid realities while promoting genuine human connection.



**Figure 15.** Evolution of the concept of third places in time.  
Created by the author.

## **4.2 Women’s evolution in the use of third place according to age, work format, and living situation**

This chapter explores how women’s engagement with third places shifts depending on their life stage, work setup, and living situation. These three dimensions shape not only when and how women access third places, but also what they need from them and how these places support them.

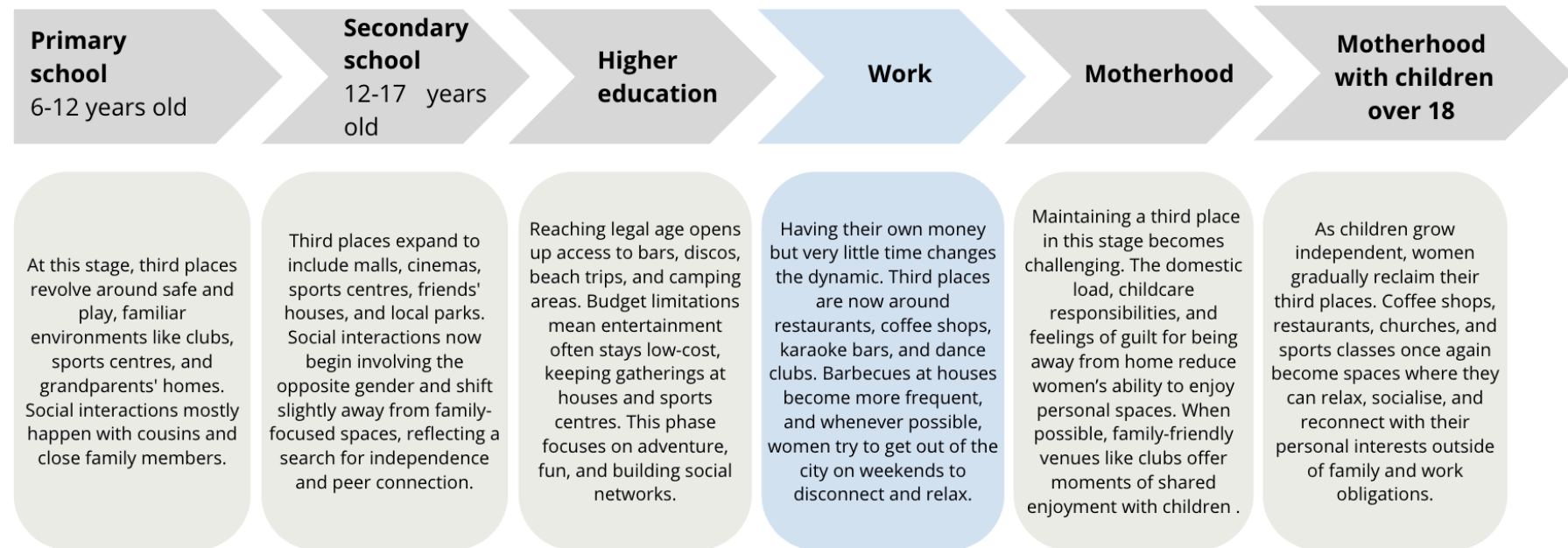
### **4.2.1 Age and Life Stage: The Evolving Role of Third Places**

As women move through different stages of life—from childhood to motherhood and beyond—their relationship with third places transforms. Figure 17 illustrates this progression, starting with early safe environments like clubs and grandparents’ homes in childhood, shifting to malls and social parks in adolescence, and expanding to more adventurous, low-cost spaces like beach trips and discos during higher education. In working life, third places become limited to quick escapes—cafés, restaurants, or weekend getaways—as women balance work with personal time.

During active motherhood, third places are often lost or redefined as family-oriented venues due to childcare and domestic burdens. However, as children become independent, women begin reclaiming these spaces for themselves—returning to coffee shops, churches, and recreational classes that offer both social and personal joy.

From young women seeking fun and freedom to mothers craving respite, third places are not just leisure—they are lifelines. Thoughtfully designed, they can become powerful platforms for community, care, and personal renewal.

## Usage of Third Places Across Women's Life Stages in Lima



**Figure 17.** Usage of Third Places Across Women's Life Stages in Lima.  
Created by the author.

## 4.2.2 Work Format: On-Site, Hybrid, and Remote Workers

Figure 18 compares how different work structures impact women’s interact with third places. On-site workers tend to have strict routines and limited time, relying on third places primarily for stress relief and physical self-care (e.g., gyms, salons). Hybrid workers benefit from flexibility, seeking balance in social third places between home and office like cafés and coworking spots. Remote workers, while enjoying high autonomy, often crave connection and visibility—turning to third places to break social isolation.

	On-site Worker	Hybrid Worker	Remote Worker
Work Location	Fully at the company or office	A mix of office and remote	Fully remote, from home or anywhere
Routine	Fixed schedule, commuting daily	Flexible, structured around meetings/projects	Highly flexible, self-managed
Lifestyle	Clear boundaries between work and life, less flexibility	Balanced lifestyle, freedom to shape the day	Blurred work-life boundaries, high autonomy, and needs for connection.
Feelings	"Very rigid office hours from 9 to 6... It limits hobbies and time with my children, which for me was non-negotiable."	"I work in the office until midday, then remotely. Afternoons are for my own entrepreneurship."	"Working from home can feel lonely... I try cafés to stay connected and avoid overworking."
Challenges	Long commutes, strict schedules, and hard to find time for self-care	Keep the balance and the organization to handle time	Maximize productivity to work in less time, reduce distractions at home, risk of overworking, and find ways to socialize
What are they looking to find in third places?	Places that provide relaxation or extreme liberation of stress and buildings, like: spa, hairdresser, gym, pubs, restaurants with outdoor.	Places between home and work to maintain the balance: cafés, coworking spots, clubs, gyms.	Interactive places to break isolation: Cafés, community hubs, co-living spaces, co-creation hubs.

**Figure 18.** Women’s Workplace Format and Third Place Needs. Created by the author.

## 4.2.3. Living situation: alone, in a Couple, or with Family

Figure 19 presents a comparison of women’s third place needs based on their domestic setting. Women living alone seek connection and safe spaces to unwind and meet others,

often facing loneliness or safety concerns at night. Women in relationships strive for both togetherness and independence, using third places to share meaningful time or reclaim space for themselves. Third places provide couples with new and fresh conversation topics positively impacting in the relationship. While, women with families face the greatest time constraints, often seek third places that allow moments of rest, inclusion of children, and freedom from caregiving demands.

	<b>Women Living Alone</b>	<b>Women in a Couple</b>	<b>Women with Family</b>
What They Look for in Third Places	Connection, meet new people, fun, safe social spots	Time together and apart, shared hobbies, and personal autonomy	Relief, rest, safety, support with caregiving, and spaces that include children
Time They Can Allocate	More flexible time, especially after work or on weekends	Moderate time, negotiated with partner, or shared responsibilities	Very limited, fragmented time—mostly weekends or during children’s activities
Main Challenges	Loneliness and safety concerns at night outs	Coordinating schedules, balancing shared time and personal freedom	Overload from unpaid care work, guilt for taking time for self, and limited child-inclusive third places
Feelings	"I like to spend time alone, but sometimes you get tired of your own thoughts"	"I do everything with my partner; sometimes it's good to have your space and bring fresh air to the relationship"	"I love my family, but sometimes I feel like I'm always on duty—there's barely a moment just for me."

**Figure 19.** Women’s Living Conditions and Third Place Needs.

Created by the author.

Understanding how third place needs shift with age, work, and domestic context is essential for designing spaces that truly serve women. Rather than universal solutions, women benefit most from third places that acknowledge time poverty, safety needs, emotional labor, and different forms of connection.

### 4.3 Value and general discoveries concerning third place for women in Lima

Third places offer more than leisure for women in Lima; they provide relaxation, connection, and sense of belonging. In other words, third places in Lima are not only social settings—they are essential coping spaces to help women manage the everyday life.

- **Work-Life Balance:** For the majority work-life balance is associated to the places for their eating breaks of the day or where they perform their physical activity, which offers them time to unwind and reset.
- **Community building:** Is associated to those third places that provide group activities like dancing, dog walking, volleyball, yoga, cycling, and running. What starts as a group class often continues with chats, karaoke, or drinks after. And for many these third places become circles of resilience, offering emotional support through transitions like menopause or widowhood.
- **Well-being:** Third places are a key source of emotional balance, helping women recover from routine stress and reconnect with joy. Laughter, self-care, healthy food, and nature all play a role in how women experience well-being.

#### General discoveries concerning third place for women in Lima

1. **Post-pandemic flexibility:** Remote work allows women more time for activities beyond home and work, such as socializing or personal activities.

"So, while the kids are at daycare, school, or wherever, we're dancing—not in the office. Then we go back home, reconnect with work duties, but never stuck with a limiting schedule anymore. We also go out for breakfast after dancing, sometimes."

– W1

2. **Gender differences:** Men often link third spaces to football and barbecues with alcohol, while women are more focused on being productive the next day.

"When I hang out with my husband's friends, gatherings drag on forever—snacks, late cooking, endless drinks. He's happy, but I get tired thinking about everything I have to do the next day." – W4

There are third places male-dominant that repel women from socializing like: pool halls, gaming arcades, and football/basket/ping pong courts. Likewise, there are female dominant places like: churches, salons, brunch spots, or foodmarkets.

"I never went to the bars in front the university, all the pool tables were used by man. I just never felt that was a place for me." – W3

### 3. **Favorite third places:**

**Parks** are popular among those with dogs and kids for walking and relaxing in nature.

"I have a dog. I love parks because there are a lot of them here, so I like to go out and walk through them, look around, see the flowers, pray to the Virgin Mary, walk around." – W8

**Beach as a constant:** The beach is a recurring third place in interviews for personal connection, walks, friends gatherings or birthday celebrations; reflecting its significance in a coastal city like Lima.

"On Tuesday, I went to the beach to eat, and I put my feet in the sand, touched the sea — it was cold — and I felt so happy, so relaxed, so connected, because the beach does me so, so much good." - W4

**Clubs for memorable moments:** Clubs provide opportunities for fun and memorable social experiences, like celebrations and intimate conversations, in a safe environment for children and youth.

"Now, the only moment I have to disconnect is at the club, because the little ones

are entertained in the play area, and I can relax and chat in peace.” - W10

**Chifas:** Chinese-Peruvian restaurant are an excellent example of a third place in Lima. It is convenient, there is one in every neighbourhood. It preserves culinary tradition and cultural identity, serving as a familiar and comforting space for locals. It often attracts regular customers who create a sense of community and belonging. Moreover, many chifas are family-run businesses, where owners and their relatives personally manage the service, creating a welcoming, home-like atmosphere that encourages informal social interaction and connection.

**Cafes:** are spaces for reconnecting with friends and have long talks.

“I keep the tradition to go with a friend once a week for a coffee or a dessert. My mom always took me to cafes to ask me about my personal life and we still do that until now, so I like doing it with friends, as well.” - W4

**Non-public third places (homes):** Homes, like grandma’s house or a beach house, can function as third places, strengthening intimacy. The article titled "Expanding Oldenburg: Homes as Third Places" by David Purnell challenges the conventional view that third places are exclusively public venues. He proposes that private homes can also function as third places when they host regular, informal gatherings that strengthen community bonds. This perspective emphasizes that the essence of a third place lies not in its physical setting but in its role as a facilitator of social interaction and community building (Purnell, 2014).

4. **Weather's impact:** In summer, activities revolve around the beach, while in winter, they shift to home gatherings and barbecues.

“In winter, there aren’t many things to do during the day, and at night, you might go out just for a bit.” – W2

5. **Desire to disconnect:** Hybrid and remote workers specially show a strong desire to disconnect from digital devices and enjoy moments of disconnection in nature or personal time.

“I try not to spend too much time on screens, you know? Since I’m glued to the computer all day.”- W2

“The moment I go to the park with Rocco. I usually leave my phone behind, so I’m really present. It’s mostly about observing, the silence, the nature. I really enjoy that.” - W5

6. **Elements that promote gathering:** the beach as a setting, food, and music.
7. **Energy and mood:** The frequency of visiting third places is closely linked to interviewees' energy levels and passion for life, meanwhile, interviewees with less use of third places had feelings of discomfort, boredom, or even frustration.

#### **4.4 Women’s limitations for participating in third places in Lima**

1. **Rigid working hours:** Office hours make it difficult to engage in activities like hobbies or exercise, especially while balancing family responsibilities.

"There's something that doesn't work in this system, right? Why can't one leave the office at 4:00 p.m. and be home to greet their kids when they arrive? Why is it designed so poorly? The system is terribly poor designed. And the truth is, of course, it's a system designed for men, not for women." - W1

“At work, I kept thinking, ‘When can I leave?’—especially around 3 p.m. when my kids get out of school. I just wanted the day to end. But by the time I got home, I was exhausted. I barely had energy to talk, so I’d lie in bed while my kids sat with me—I was completely drained.”- W9

2. **Domestic load:** Managing domestic chores and work creates emotional and time burdens for women, making it difficult to enjoy third places.

"It's not just about getting organised. Carrying the domestic load alongside work is complicated, heavy, and emotionally exhausting—and often invisible." - W10

3. **Guilt and resentment:** The pressure to be constantly productive or available for family leads to feelings of frustration, guilt, and resentment. Leisure has a negative connotation. “Ocio” is the word for leisure in Spanish and it is used as an offense -ocio- when someone is not using time “productively”. Mothers and pet owners are the ones who face more guilt.
4. **Amount of people:** Large crowds can make social spaces less appealing, leading some to avoid them. Interviewees mention that on sundays usually it is a bad day to go out as everything is too crowded, it is better on saturdays.
5. **Traffic:** Heavy traffic can discourage people from going out, particularly for activities like going to the beach or classes as the commuting ruins the after-effects of these activities.

“I drive about 1 hour and 10 minutes, I get home, spend time with my husband, walk the dog, cook, and watch an episode. I could exercise or do something I enjoy, but honestly, I'm too tired.”- W4

“If I go to yoga, it is a stress finding where to park and then the traffic jam to come back home takes away all my relaxation.”

6. **Judgmental society:** Fear of being judged by others in social situations can discourage people from enjoying leisure activities. Like lack of companionship makes it harder to attend social activities. Feeling like an outsider, newcomers or those unfamiliar with social groups can feel uncomfortable in social spaces.

“I mean, if they see my husband with a female friend, it's no big deal—but if they see me with a male friend, oh my god.” – W7

7. **Insecurity:** Safety concerns, particularly at night or in unfamiliar areas, deter people from going out.

"Lima is terrible right now, so we only meet up until around 10 p.m. at the latest. I prefer to take a secure ride-hailing service because driving alone at night scares me." – W7

8. **Hostile architecture:** The design of public spaces doesn't solve the underlying issues of crime and social safety.

"It's really sad that some parks don't even have benches, or they're surrounded by security fences. There's no place where you can just relax—no beanbags, blankets, hammocks—nothing cozy, you know?" – W3

9. **Money:** The cost of certain activities, like private training sessions or social outings, can be deterrents

#### 4.5 New needs in the design of Great Third Places

New needs in the use of third places have emerged, complementing the concepts proposed by Oldenburg (1999), Project for Public Spaces (2022), and Taştan & Polatoğlu (2023). What matters is not the physical form, but the emotional function: spaces where women feel present, safe, and themselves. (See Figure 16)

1. **Nature & Outdoor Connection**

People crave the outdoors, feeling connected with nature in urban spaces.

“My best moments are always connected to nature — camping trips, the water, the sea, the beach, the forest, countless getaways to the hills, hikes — always with a small group of close friends, full of fun and adventure.” - W1

2. **Intimacy & Authentic Human Connections**

It's not just about interaction, but creating meaningful, personal bonds. “There should be someone to introduce you; that would be ideal.” – W6

“I place where I won't be judge for crying or laughing” – W5

3. **Healthy look & feel**

Fresh, high-quality food that not only tastes good but also feels nourishing. That gives you vegan and vegetarian alternatives.

“I love that place because in the menu they show the procedence of the products they use.” – W7

#### **4. Inclusive & Pet-Friendly**

Places friendly to different ages, genders, personalities, or pets, making everyone feel welcome. “I place where I can be me and dress how I like” – W2

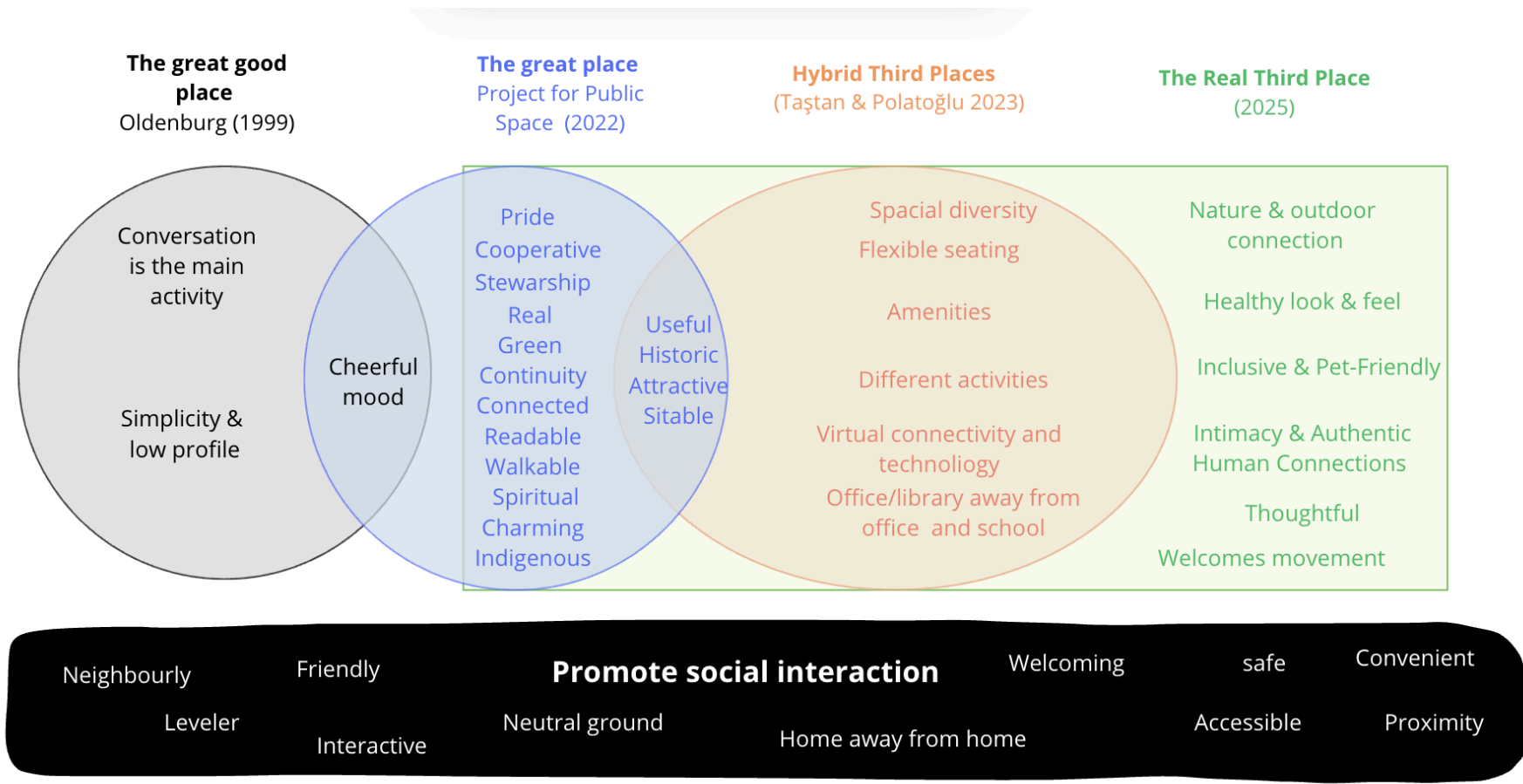
“Where I can take my dog and don’t feel bad that he is alone at home” – W4

#### **5. Thoughtful**

Thought in detail for all the different profiles. Interviewees highlight the small details in their different experiences as memorable facts. For example, with safe spots for your bike, trolley, or other personal belongings, and places for pregnant women to lay or facilities for post-pregnancy. “Now that I am pregnant, my back hurts all the time, and this place had stretchers to lie down on” – W10

#### **6. Welcomes movement**

Moving, changing place, changing activity, have alternatives to be sitting. “If I want to play volleyball or just read a book or eat, I wish I could have different alternatives”. – W2



**Figure 16.** Evolution of the needs of third places in time.  
Created by the author.

#### **4.6 The Real Third Place Design Checklist (Lima, Peru – Women-Focused)**

This checklist summarizes all key considerations that emerged from interviews and previous research, specifically tailored to the social, cultural, and urban context of Lima. It reflects the new needs, preferences, and challenges identified in residents, particularly women, and aims to guide the design of gender-sensitive third places.

This guideline will serve as tool for every third place designer, owner, customer experience specialist, placemaker, and municipalities (Department of City Services and Environmental Management / Department of Public Infrastructure and Environmental Sustainability/ Human Development).

# The Real Third Place

## Gender- sensitive Design Checklist

Lima, Peru 2025

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Inclusive &amp; Thoughtful</b></p> <p>Consider the needs of all users: women, children, elders, people with disabilities, pet owners, and pets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable seating for elders and entertainment for children with safe materials</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Rest zones for pregnant or postpartum women</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Access to feminine hygiene products</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ramps and handrails throughout the space</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Intimacy and authentic human connection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide conversation starter tools (question decks, images, memes)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Long communal tables for shared meals or activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nooks or semi-private areas for quiet connection or solitude</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Nature and outdoor connection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Natural materials: wood, stone, brick, straw</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Maximize natural light with big windows and skylights</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate greenery and indoor plants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Include sensory elements: sounds of nature in restrooms or waiting areas</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If possible, offer an outdoor zone with shade and seating</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fire pits or fireplaces for warmth and ambiance</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Well-being and Sustainability at the core</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure proper ventilation and natural air flow</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Maintain cleanliness and fresh-smelling interiors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fresh and sustainable ingredients</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reusable materials and recycling disposals.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Flexible use and hybrid functions</b></p> <p>Allow people to move and be able to stand, sit, lie, etc. Provide quiet corners or co-work zones for hybrid/remote workers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Free WiFi, charging stations, and tables</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Movable seating for privacy or socialising</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Beanbags, cushions, and blankets for comfort</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Board games area, books, newspapers, and painting materials</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use of social media to reinforce communication</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Encourage Care &amp; stewardship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Let users access materials and tools freely, as if in their own home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide marked cleaning stations and bins for trash or recyclables.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use name tags that share staff hobbies or interests to humanize interaction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Promote values that make people feel safe and in community: like a lost and found corner, trade books, selling local or second-hand items.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Built safety measures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bright lighting in all paths and corners</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> CCTV and a visible, friendly security presence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Good signage for wayfinding and nearby transport access</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Avoid blind spots or hidden areas</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Co-Design &amp; Feedback Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Involve locals from all genders and ages</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Organize co-creation sessions, workshops, or pop-ups</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Set up physical and digital feedback channels: suggestion boxes, online forms, etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Update users about changes made thanks to their feedback</li> </ul>

**Figure 20.** The Real Third Place. Gender-sensitive design checklist (Lima, Peru, 2025)

Created by the author.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Is it the end of traditional third places? This is a question that many sociologists, anthropologists, and social media influencers are asking. Through out this study we have explore the evolution of these places and we can conclude that there has been a drastic shift due to the Covid -19 legacy, like the anthropologist Guilia Balestra described, “as our second and third places slowly became smaller and smaller, our first place had to accommodate more than what it had been used and designed for” (2020). Resulting in what the italian Designer, Manzini, calls the emerging city of “everything at/from home” as a non-city of self-confined individuals in isolation in their homes, a social desert of an aggregate of individuals without communities, without common goods, and place, who for reasons of convenience, could continue to live this way even when it is no longer an obligation (2022). Therefore, traditional third places as described by Oldenburg (1989) are each time more scarce, but new forms have appeared which Taştan and Polatoğlu (2023) call “Hybrid Third Places”. These new formats are places that adapt to the various new needs of people, providing spatial diversity, flexible siting, different amenities and activities, virtual connectivity and technology, where a third place not only feels like home, but like a comfortable working place too. (See Figure 16)

As a result of the ethnographic research conducted among limeans, new needs for third places were mapped that are currently uncovered by most venues. This is what we have named as “The Real Third Place”, given the current context where we live in the boom of AI, social media and heavy usage of digital devices, people are craving real connections that make them feel present, feel nature, have intimacy with friends, allow their movement, provide healthy deals and are thoughtful and empathetic towards their needs.

Moreover, with this study, we could better understand the gender gap in third places. For women in Lima, third places hold a deeper social and emotional significance. They are not only spaces for leisure or escape but vital zones for reclaiming autonomy, identity, and rest. Wearing (1995) highlighted that if women do not see the city as a viable leisure space, they are unlikely to participate in its transformation into a community resource.

The testimonies collected in this study suggest that third places provide women with scarce opportunities to disconnect from caregiving roles and unpaid domestic labour. They are also viewed as spaces for emotional expression, informal social bonding, and physical renewal. However, access to third places remains uneven. Many women face systemic barriers—including time poverty, gendered safety concerns, and exclusionary design—that limit their ability to fully engage or benefit from these spaces. These findings are consistent with recent feminist urban research, which emphasises the need for spaces that reflect women's rhythms, responsibilities, and emotional needs (Yassein, 2024).

Importantly, when third places are designed with women in mind—incorporating features like childcare, safety, natural elements, and inclusive programming—they can serve as powerful tools for gender equity. They not only support women's well-being but also strengthen their social participation and visibility.

Why does Service Design play an important role in this shift? By involving communities in the design process, service design “helps create spaces that not only meet functional requirements but also resonate with the people who use them”(Aricò et al., 2024). Service design, hand in hand with Placemaking, are the best tools to study and create third places because they both focus on people and the systems they live in. Service Design helps us understand the whole picture—how people move, interact, and what they need—so we can design solutions that truly fit into their daily lives. Placemaking, on the other hand, brings people together to shape their own spaces, making them feel more connected and valued. Together, they allow us to create places that are useful and meaningful; instead of top-down decisions, these approaches involve local voices to make places feel truly theirs. They help transform empty or disconnected spaces into vibrant ones where people can meet and feel they belong. In this way, Service Design and Placemaking, through a gender-sensitive perspective, offer the most effective framework for creating inclusive, vibrant, and socially sustainable third places where everyone—especially women—can feel safe, seen, and connected.

The challenge and opportunity lie in designing and supporting spaces that embrace these hybrid realities while promoting genuine human connection.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this research, we have understood how the Third Place Theory proposed by Oldenburg in 1989 has evolved in the last years, passing from being places for conversation to hybrid places where many activities can take place. We also understood how the Knowledge Economy created new socializing and living concepts where home (first place), work (second place) and community (third place) overlap, like coworkings, comminglings and colivings and how all this new models were highly impacted by the pandemic where all kind of socialization was banned, turning our first places into hosts of workplaces and social interaction. To conclude by understanding the legacy that this forced isolation (Covid-19) left in our societies, where many third places had to close because of bankruptcy, and other workplaces closed their offices as they realized it was more cost-efficient to maintain workers remotely or hybrid. (See Figure 15)

In addition to this, this study explored what makes third places “great places”, by reviewing Oldenburg’s (1999) Great Place attributes, as well as Project for Public Spaces (2022) proposal for successful places, and Taştan and Polatoğlu's (2023) characteristics of Hybrid third places. This analysis resulted in a new version of updated attributes based on the needs of women from Lima City in 2025, to what we call “ The Real Third Place” —as the new needs are related to nature, intimacy, movement, health, and empathy. However, as shown in Figure 16, there are attributes that, even after time passes, are maintained, like the promotion of social interaction, a neutral ground for everyone, safety, and convenience. Other attributes have been lost, like “conversation as main activity” that has changed into the “availability of different activities, amenities, and facilities”. What matters is not the physical form, but the emotional function: spaces where women feel present, safe, and themselves. It is all about creating micro-moments of well-being, connection, and self-care in a city that often limits their time, energy, and access.

Also, the in-depth conversations with women from different backgrounds allowed us to understand the main challenges that they face when using third places in Lima, the main limitations to frequent third places: traffic, insecurity, and rigid working hours. Which

represent barriers originate from wicked problems such as governmental corruption, lack of urban planning, and a working system that hasn't been adapted to women's needs. Likewise, challenges related to domestic load and feeling of guilt when leaving the kids or pets at home come from a structural gap in gender roles in Peru. (See chapter 4.5 )

Additionally, engaging with women in Lima for this study revealed the important role third places play in their lives. These spaces offer opportunities to unwind and recharge, helping them maintain a balance between work and home. Moreover, it strengthens bonding and builds resilience through community strengthening. And, contributes to overall well-being by providing moments of laughter, self-care, disconnection, and presence. (See chapter 4.3)

Furthermore, this study allowed us to map the role of third places in different moments of this woman's life and comprehend the different needs regarding the stage of life. Like how safety and entertainment are crucial for third places when you are a child and how important mingling activities are when they are in adolescence. The fact of reaching legal age opens new alternatives and activities, and later, the fact of receiving a salary brings them to new social dynamics like restaurants and hairdressers. Changing completely when motherhood starts, as third places are shared with children, until they are independent, and women can reclaim their third places. (See Figure 17)

Also, this study permitted us to see the impact the work lifestyle of women has on the places they look for. Women working on-site look for places that provide relaxation or extreme liberation from stress and buildings. (See Figure 18) Meanwhile, remote workers look for interactive places to break isolation, and hybrid workers are looking for places between home and work to maintain their longed balance. Likewise, women living alone, with a couple, and family crave different third places. (See Figure 19)

Along with these previous findings, interesting insights appeared that might be relevant for people in the third place industry. Like the value that the coastline represents for women in Lima as a third place to relax, meditate, and calm anxiety. The “chifa” is a great third place

as it is convenient (there is one in every neighbourhood), keeps tradition, has regulars, and people working there are usually the owners or relatives bringing home vibes. Also, Clubs are places of family and friends' memorable bonding moments. (Chapter 4.4)

Additionally, this results were contrasted and complemented with social media research about new informal gathering trends, which resulted in a list of 5 emerging categories of third places: more consciously healthy venues (the coffee rave, the offline club, Kava bars), reclaim of underused public spaces (DJ sessions in London's train wagons and boardgames in Estacion de Francia, Spain), animal as hook for third places (animal cafes and puppy yoga sessions), co-creation hubs (open libraries, repair cafes and Fab Labs), and physical and digital blend experiences (like Timeleft). (See more in Chapter 2.2.4)

All this information has been condensed into a checklist design guideline for gender-sensitive third places. Which pretends to guide all people interested in creating places of informal public social interaction, like third place owners, customer experience specialists, NGO's, Municipalities, or Unions. The purpose of this checklist is to create "Real Third Places" and guarantee that the new needs of residents, especially women, are met. (Figure 20)

For further studies, I recommend adding interviews with non-binary residents from Modern Lima, so that this checklist can be entirely gender-sensitive.

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## APPENDICES

### Question guide

#### **Presentation protocol**

Hello my name is Brenda

I am researching people's lifestyles, especially regarding their leisure time and the places they often go. I want to understand the value these places represent and how people experience work-life balance, well-being, and community.

- I have a list of questions, but we can go deeper into topics that are relevant to your experience.
- It will last approximately 60 minutes.
- I'm interested in your personal experiences and opinions, there is no wrong or right answer. Feel free to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable with.
- Your responses will be kept confidential, and any data used in my research will be anonymized.*
- With your permission, I'd like to record this conversation for accuracy in analysis. Let me know if you're okay with that.*

#### **Section 1: General information**

1. Describe yourself :
  - a. What is your main activity - office/hybrid/remote?
  - b. Where do you live?
  - c. Who do you live with- living conditions?
  - d. What are your interests/ what things you like?
2. Lifestyle:
  - a. Describe how a weekday is in your life from the moment you wake up until you sleep: (Think about yesterday)
    - i. What were the moments you enjoyed the most? And disliked the most?
  - b. How does it differ from a weekend day? Can you describe your last one
  - c. How would you describe your lifestyle?
  - d. How many hours a day do you spend in front of a screen on average a week?
    - i. How many with friends?
    - ii. How many with family?

## **Section 2: Work-life balance**

1. How do you feel after work?
2. What do you usually do after work? Please describe it.
  - a. How does that make you feel?
3. Is there any place you enjoy being that is not your house, not your work/school?
  - a. What do you like about it?
4. Is there something you will change about your work-life balance?

## **Section 3: Well-being**

1. Do you have any rituals of self-care?
  - a. How is it?
  - b. Alone or company?
  - c. How often do you do it?
  - d. How does it make you feel?
  - e. What prevents you from doing these rituals more often?

## **Section 4: Community Building & Resilience**

1. When was the last time you had a really bad day?
2. What did you do to feel better?
3. Do you have who to approach in these moments?
  - a. Why these people?
4. Which is the best place and moment for this kind of talk?
  - a. Why?
5. Describe your last encounter
6. In general, what are the reasons to meet them?
7. What would make meeting them easier or more fulfilling for you?

## **Section 5: Past thinking- Tracking third place evolution**

1. Think when you were a kid around 11-13 years old, where did you spend most of the time out of home and school?
  - a. Why?
  - b. How does it make you feel?
  - c. What activities did you do there?
  - d. With whom?
2. How did it change when you were in your last years of school (14-17 years old)?

- a. Why?
  - b. How does it make you feel?
  - c. What activities did you do there?
  - d. With whom?
3. During your 20s, where did you spend most of the time out of home and university/work?
    - a. Why?
    - b. How does it make you feel?
    - c. What activities did you do there?
    - d. With whom?

If this applies, ask:

4. During your 30s, where did you spend most of the time out of home and university/work?
5. During your 40s, where did you spend most of the time out of home and university/work?

### **Section 6: Design prompt- Draw your ideal space**

1. Imagine you had a magic wand to create a space that will make you feel comfortable out of home and work.

Card sorting: which values will you prioritize, rank them:

- Proximity
- Intimacy
- Spirituality
- Trust
- Relaxation
- Sociability
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

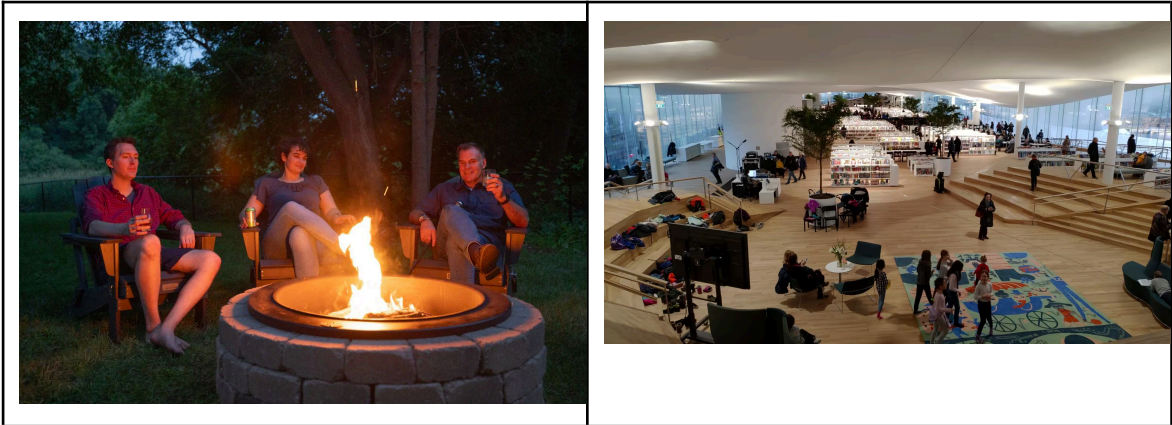
Now think of:

- a. Sensory elements (e.g., sounds, smells, colors).
- b. Activities that take place there.
- c. Types of people they'd want to meet there.
- d. Emotional needs it fulfills.
- e. How would this space improve your daily life? Your relationships?

f. How does it look? Draw your concept

Prompts:





2. How would you describe in words this place that is not your home and not your work place?