

# **Culture and Chaos: Interpreting the Appeal of an Alley in Xalapa, Mexico**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Culture and Chaos: Interpreting the Appeal of an Alley in Xalapa, Mexico**

In the downtown area of the city of Xalapa, Mexico there is a very popular narrow alley better known by the locals as “El Callejon del Diamante” (the Diamond’s alley in English). In this urban space, which is a pedestrian-oriented street, can be found small shops where handicrafts made by local artists are sold. There are also coffee shops and restaurants, but the hallmark of this space is the informal commerce that is established daily. Commonly known as the “hippies”, are the artisanal jewelry makers who expose their goods in the walkable area reducing even more of the remaining space. Added to this invasion are the outdoor tables and chairs of the restaurants, these are to serve the customers that no longer fit inside, also the advertising signs and the goods displayed outside of the “established” shops. The question is what does this alley have that attracts many people to explore it, even if at first sight it’s perceived as a crowded and chaotic space.

By analyzing this alley through an urban cultural landscape study, I will review the urban space, and the shops in every building of the context. I will examine the daily activity, the interaction between the site and the people who work in it as well as the interaction between the site and its visitors to decipher what makes it so attractive to visit, the reason why it has become a landmark in the city’s center and what makes it a contribution to the vitality of the historic urban center of Xalapa.

## RÉSUMÉ

### **Culture et Chaos : Interprétation de l'attrait d'une Ruelle de Xalapa, Mexique.**

En ville, à Xalapa, il y a une ruelle étroite, très populaire, mieux connue chez les autochtones comme « El Callejon del Diamante » (la ruelle du Diamant, en français). Dans cet espace urbain, rue à vocation piétonne, on peut trouver des échoppes d'artisanat fabriqué par les artistes du crû. Il y a aussi des cafés et restaurants, mais le commerce informel qui s'y tient quotidiennement est la marque de fabrique de cet endroit. Connus sous le nom de « hippies », les fabricants de bijoux artisanaux qui exposent leurs marchandises dans la surface piétonne, réduisent encore l'espace. Ajoutant à l'invasion, les tables et chaises extérieures des restaurants destinées à recevoir les clients qui n'ont plus de place à l'intérieur, les enseignes publicitaires et les marchandises installées à l'extérieur de ces boutiques « établies ». La question est la suivante : « Qu'a donc cette ruelle pour attirer tant de monde à l'explorer, même si au premier abord, elle est perçue comme un endroit chaotique et bondé ? »

En analysant cette ruelle, dans une étude du paysage culturel urbain, je passerai en revue l'espace urbain, et les boutiques de chacune des constructions de ce contexte. J'examinerai l'activité quotidienne, l'interaction entre le site et ses travailleurs, de même que l'interaction entre le site et ses visiteurs, afin de déchiffrer ce qui le rend si attirant à visiter, raison pour laquelle il est devenu un site touristique au centre ville. J'examinerai également ce qui en fait une contribution à la vitalité du centre historique urbain de Xalapa.

*To mom and dad*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of a landscape is based on the analysis of its anatomy, physical characteristics, typologies, surroundings, inhabitants and the activities that take place in it. In this research paper I am pursuing to study a landscape, its everyday activity and the interaction between its people. Above all I want to understand this relationship between the users and residents of an area and the activities they perform in the physical urban space. Specifically this research will focus on an alley located in the Historic Center of Xalapa, the capital city of the state of Veracruz, Mexico.

This alley is better known by locals as *El Callejon del Diamante*, which is located in Downtown Xalapa. It is a narrow pedestrian street where most of the buildings have commercial establishments at ground level; which mainly sell a broader merchandise of handicrafts. However, in this place there is also informal commerce, which is mainly artisans selling handmade jewelry. This space is crowded everyday, not only by locals but also by tourists. The alley is popular despite its disorganization and chaotic atmosphere. Therefore, this research paper will investigate why people still come and visit; even when there is so much commotion, activity and confusion. The purpose of this research paper is to develop a cultural landscape study of *El Callejon del Diamante*.

### **The Context of the Site**

The city of Xalapa is in the central eastern side of Mexico; and because the city is located in the foothills of a mountain; it has spectacular views of the surrounding landscapes. Famous for its



abundant vegetation and mild pleasant climate, this city had its time of splendor in the colonial era around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Today, it is nationally recognized as an important stage of the contemporary cultural and artistic movement. However, Xalapa continues to express a traditional and provincial environment particularly in its city center. It is here where the commercial, cultural and artistic traditions of past generations are complemented by the pace of modern life.

### **Approach of the Study**

The Cultural Landscape, as the geographer Carl O. Sauer defined, is fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, and the cultural landscape is the result<sup>1</sup>. Landscape in this sense is a particular area shaped by a cultural group and strongly influenced by the limits of soil, climate and vegetation. This type of study involves the users, their cultures and the conflicting interests in their urban situation.

Therefore, each space will contain, be enclosed by or look out to elements that establish its particular character. Qualities like: light, texture and detail of materials, building pattern, plants, pavements and colors are recordable characteristics that create ambience. The intensity of occupancy and the types of uses to which buildings are put, are elements of character that communicate social value<sup>2</sup>. However, architecture alone does not create a cultural landscape. The way people use the space between buildings: the enacted environment, is a necessary component

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, "The Polyphony of Cultural Landscape Study," in *Everyday America. Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, ed. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ned Crankshaw, *Creating Vibrant Public Spaces. Streetscape Design in Commercial and Historic Districts* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2009), 83.

of a vital cultural landscape because users provide important evidence of social life and cultural values.

People like to experience places. A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered, enjoyed, or avoided. The depth that characterizes a cultural landscape is human as well as physical and sensorial. It is a thick layer of history, memory, association and attachment that builds up in a location as a result of experiencing the place<sup>3</sup>.

The cultural landscape study comes from work on ethnography: the individual perception of the environment. The ways in which individual experiences and memories in a community become the basis for shared social and cultural ideas and actions. In a dialectical feedback loop; social experience influences individual thought and life<sup>4</sup>.

The experience of a place generates a “sense of place”. This is used to describe the atmosphere of a place and the quality of its environment<sup>5</sup>. A sense of place grows as one becomes accustomed to it and learns to know its peculiarities. A sense of place is something that people create in the course of time; the result of habit and custom. A complex deeply felt sense of place can emerge whenever and wherever people settle on the land long enough to develop shared experiences and tell stories about those experiences.

Nevertheless, it has to be recognized that certain localities have an attraction which provides certain indefinable sense of well-being and produces the desire in people to return again. These localities are appreciated because they are embedded in the everyday world around us and are easily accessible; but at the same time are distinct from that world. A visit to one of them is a

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<sup>3</sup> Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape. Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 38-39.

<sup>4</sup> Groth and Wilson, 15.

<sup>5</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 158.

small but also a significant event. People get refreshed and elated each time they visit these places.

For this reason I chose to create a cultural landscape study of *El Callejon del Diamante*; because of its distinctiveness I wanted to see how its self-contained geography and peculiar physical appearance affected the sense of place of the people who live, use and work there. I intend to bring the research closer to the lives of people; because the sense of place is the only way of truly understanding the cultural landscape of a place.

In this research paper, each chapter is an investigation of this pedestrian street with unique historical conditions. This study focuses on explorations of its land use evolution, its urban process and the peculiarities of this alley. Furthermore, it shows that landscapes and places do not have to be national centers of cultural attention or to have accumulated thick sediment of well-publicized history in order to be richly significant.

## **Methodology of the Study**

The methodology used for this research paper is essentially a study of the geographic cultural personality of *El Callejon del Diamante*. Combining through documentary research with comprehensive fieldwork; this research paper will render a highly illuminating portrayal of this particular alley that has fascinated both locals and outsiders.

The cultural dimension of this alley could not be adequately assessed except through historical and contemporary exploration of its form and pattern. The research of the alley involved collecting data from a broader to a more specific scale: from the context of the city and its Historic Center to the context of the life in *El Callejon del Diamante*.

Historical research of the city, downtown and the alley was gathered through literature and archival information based on municipal texts, photographs and oral history of residents. To further examine the activities in the alley; it was necessary to go on a one-month visit to the site. This fieldwork was partly based on the collection of data through photographs and the mapping of its components to investigate its physical form, spatial arrangement, density and environment. This research paper then becomes a convenient visual medium for interpreting the alley through the analysis of its landscape anatomy.

More importantly, this fieldwork collected data through interviews with the vendors, customers, passers and owners of shops of the alley to present the collective memory of users and information of the current environment of the site; because built forms and expressions of the landscape are cultural evidence for the relation between the place and its people.

### **Organization of the Research Paper**

This research paper is organized in six sections. The first section introduces the basis and arrangement of this cultural landscape study.

The first chapter presents the city of Xalapa historically and spatially; thus providing a context for understanding the range of the city settlement over time and across geographic space.

The second chapter explores the urban, cultural, touristic and commercial landscapes of Downtown Xalapa.

The third chapter focuses on *El Callejon del Diamante* discussing and describing its current environment and its landscape components.

The fourth chapter presents the life of the alley through the words of people experiencing it everyday.

The last section presents the conclusions drawn from data gathered during fieldwork and research to establish how it contributes to the vitality of the historic urban center of the city, why it has a great acceptance between the population, and finally, to understand what makes it so attractive despite its current visual features.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Xalapa, City of Flowers

Xalapa was an important city during the colonial period. It was a witness and participant of political and economic events that changed the course of what is now known as Mexico. Its natural features made it a point of relevance during the Spanish occupation in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. However, the importance of Xalapa continues until this day. This city has left behind the days of when it was a major travel hub in the colonial era to become a reference center of artistic manifestation in the contemporary times.

Currently, Xalapa is considered one of the most cultural cities in Mexico. Its beginnings as a city date back to the early colonial period. Xalapa has a long history as a meeting point between foreign nations and Mexico. This situation created in Xalapa has altered its customs and traditions. These alterations are especially in its commercial, cultural and artistic aspects; generating this young city to stand out above the rest of the country.



Fig. 1.1: Location of Mexico in the global context.

The cosmopolitan character and the designation as a national stage of artistic expression of Xalapa are evident due to the multicultural influence of the city. These characteristics are sheltered under the traditional atmosphere of an old city with strong colonial features.

Xalapa is a city of ambiguities. The past and the present join perfectly every day in its downtown streets. Therefore, it is no surprise that the cultural and contemporary expression of this city is mainly developed in its eighteenth century city center.

Under the name of Xalapa de Enriquez<sup>6</sup> is how currently this city is officially identified. Xalapa is the state capital of Veracruz. Veracruz, with a surface area of almost seventy-two thousand square kilometers<sup>7</sup>, is a state located in the eastern center of the country; covering part of the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico.



**Fig. 1.2: Location of the state of Veracruz and the city of Xalapa in Mexico.**

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<sup>6</sup> In honor of Juan de la Luz Enriquez, illustrious former Governor.

<sup>7</sup> “Información General del Estado” (Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, April 2010).

<http://www.veracruz.gob.mx/nuestro-estado/informacion-general-del-estado/> (May 28, 2012)

Meanwhile, Xalapa is located in the central part of the state. Xalapa has an elevation of 1427 meters above sea level<sup>8</sup>. The city is situated in the foothills of the Macuiltepetl Mountain. Its position provides a privileged view of three hundred and sixty degrees: towards the east is the sea, to the south looms the majestic *Pico de Orizaba* or Citlaltepetl<sup>9</sup>, to the west is the elevation known as the *Cofre de Perote*, while to the north is seen the mountain range known as *Sierra Madre Oriental*.

The magnificent views of the city, its humid and temperate climate, its vast vegetation and abundance of flowers in the region made Baron Alexander von Humboldt baptize Xalapa in 1804 with the name “City of Flowers”<sup>10</sup>.

## **Origin of Xalapa**

Xalapa has its origins in the Indian settlements founded approximately in 1380. Its inhabitants were members of the indigenous group Totonaca. This group named their territory Xalla-a-pan; which means “place of the spring in the sand”<sup>11</sup>. Its name refers to the plenty of water that is used to sprout from the sandy slopes of its topography.

During the Aztec Empire, the emperor Moctezuma invaded the present territory of Veracruz in 1457. Numerous indigenous settlements including Xalla-a-pan were forced to serve his empire.

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<sup>8</sup> “Ubicación Geográfica” (Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enríquez, November, 2009).

<http://www.xalapa.gob.mx/turismos/ubicacion-geografica/> (May 28, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> The Highest mountain in Mexico and the third highest in North America.

“Pico de Orizaba” (Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, June, 2009).

[http://portal.veracruz.gob.mx/portal/page?\\_pageid=313,4544264&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.veracruz.gob.mx/portal/page?_pageid=313,4544264&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL) (May 28, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Rachel A. Moore, *Forty Miles from the Sea: Xalapa, the Public Sphere, and the Atlantic World in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2011), 136

<sup>11</sup> “Antecedentes Históricos” (Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enríquez, November, 2009).

<http://www.xalapa.gob.mx/turismos/antecedentes-historicos/> (May 28, 2012).



During this period, the territory of Xalapa remained under the disposition of the regime without generating importance.

This situation of insignificance changed when Hernan Cortes and his conquering fleet reached the Atlantic coast of Mexico in 1519<sup>12</sup>. Cortes arrived at the coast of what is now known as port of Veracruz<sup>13</sup>. Guided by the natives, Cortes began his journey to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan<sup>14</sup>. The main purpose of Cortes was to meet the emperor Moctezuma; the richest powerful man in the territory.

Two years after their arrival in 1521<sup>15</sup>; the Spaniards conquered the Aztec territory. King Carlos I of Spain ordered Cortes to name the new territory “New Spain”. The first action in the new Spanish region was to create a path to link the city of Tenochtitlan with the port of Veracruz. This was the only port of entry to New Spain on the Atlantic coast. The purpose for this road was to carry the cargo of gold, silver and goods of the Aztec city to the fleets that would sail to Spain, or to take the supplies and Spanish soldiers from Veracruz to Tenochtitlan. This road was given the name *Camino Real*. Cortes ordered its construction in 1522 and was completed by 1525<sup>16</sup>.

In the creation of the road, Cortes ordered that the first stop of the *Camino Real* would be in the region of the Xalla-a-pan. He considered the benefits of the region like its climatic conditions and its natural resources: fresh water, vegetation and height. This region was presented as an idyllic place to become the first major carriage stop in the *Camino Real*.

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred H. Siemens, *Between the Summit and the Sea: Central Veracruz in the Nineteenth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 67.

<sup>13</sup> This port is located 35 miles north of Xalapa. Ibid, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Tenochtitlan now is known as Mexico city.

<sup>15</sup> Moore, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 3.

Major changes were made in that territory: the Spaniards changed the name to Xalapa, and they started the design of an urban plan for the community. The purpose was to make the new urban settlement to look more orderly and civilized. In the city center were established modest inns; to provide lodging to travelers whose destination was the center of New Spain. Spaniards created a convent which bore the name of *San Francisco*. The central structure of the convent had the function of serving as a church but also as a fortress. Under the leadership of Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza; its construction started in 1531 and was completed in 1534<sup>17</sup>. This convent would be a dwelling place and accommodation for clergy men throughout the colonial period.

Years later in 1604 the Hospital of *Inmaculada Concepcion* was built<sup>18</sup>. on the east side of the convent. The hospital was founded in this place because the colder land and temperate climate of New Spain begins here. When the Spaniards ascended to this altitude from the warmer climates of the port of Veracruz; it was inevitable that they would fall ill in this spot more than in the others. So for those ill Spaniards who came with the fleets; here they would have on hand the assistance of shelter and care to recover and be treated. It was evident with this new infrastructure that Xalapa had become an important travel hub.

### **Travel Hub Internationally Recognized**

The changes in the new Xalapa; now as a significant travel stop mainly affected the natives of the territory. They began to learn the Spanish language, their doctrine was changed from the

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<sup>17</sup> “Antecedentes Históricos”.

<sup>18</sup> Moore, 46.

Aztec polytheism<sup>19</sup> to Catholicism and their customs and traditions were modified according to the European standards of the time: they changed their way of dressing, eating and behaving.

Overtime, Xalapa was transformed into a travel hub worthy of any European land. The number of inns in the area were multiplied. Their services tried their best to comply with the quality standards. Visionary Spaniards started to invest their money in Xalapa. They created inns that met the needs of travelers not only from Spain but from other European countries. In fact, inn keepers made sure to prepare recipes from European dishes for customer tasting<sup>20</sup>.

By late eighteenth century, New Spain became a popular area visited by naturalists, botanists, merchants, historians, writers, artists, ambassadors and adventurers from around the world. For this reason, the *Camino Real* and all of its stops were highly inspected, analyzed and documented in several languages.

For example, reports about the port of Veracruz during the colonial period showed it as an inhospitable and undesirable place. People mentioned that travelers, who arrived at the port and whose destination was the capital of New Spain; left Veracruz as quickly as possible. Reports expressed that in Havana, travelers spent a number of days there to build up both their military and physical strength; while travelers arriving in Veracruz normally departed within a few hours of setting food on land. Just as Joel Roberts Poinsett or H.G. Ward mention in their stories<sup>21</sup>; travelers rarely stayed overnight at the port.

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<sup>19</sup> The belief of multiple deities

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>21</sup> To see more on these stories about the port of Veracruz refer to *Notes on Mexico. Made in Autumn of 1822: Accompanied by an Historical Sketch of the Revolution, and Translation of Official Reports on the Present State of that Country with a Map* by Joel Roberts Poinsett, and *Mexico in 1827* by H-G. Ward.

## Heavenly Escape form the City of the Dead

In 1825 officials at the passport office noted that most travelers who obtained passports at their point of arrival in Veracruz; traveled immediately to Xalapa where they awaited the necessary documentation to pass to the interior of the country.

The main reason was that the weather of the port of Veracruz was extremely hot and humid. It was very uncomfortable to live in. Travelers reported that in the evening and at night was impossible to rest or sleep because of the mosquito bites. The plague of mosquitoes made travelers consider the port as a contagion point of the dreaded Yellow Fever epidemic. This highly contagious disease was so deadly that could it take the life of a man in a maximum period of nine days<sup>22</sup>.

The subject of the Yellow Fever is a popular topic in the stories of the eighteenth century travelers entering New Spain through the port of Veracruz. Some mentioned that the disease arrived to New Spain in one of the European fleets; others stated that it was so difficult to eradicate it because of the excessive heat of the region<sup>23</sup>.

According to the testimonies of travelers; the disease was further spread during the warmer months, May through August<sup>24</sup>. In the case of Veracruz, all year round the port city is a warm place. This weather situation made it difficult to quell the spread. However, the principal cause of the contagion was the proliferation of mosquitoes. They were the carrying agents of the virus<sup>25</sup>. Unfortunately, the port city of Veracruz was surrounded by swamps, and these were the breeding grounds of spread agents of Yellow Fever so the epidemic seemed to have no end.

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<sup>22</sup> Siemens, 82-94.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 79, 83-85.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 88-89.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 83-84. See also, Alexander Von Humbolt's *Political Essay on the Kingdom of the New Spain*

Several campaigns were conducted to eliminate the disease in Veracruz. Despite the campaigns to kill the plagues of mosquitoes; it was very difficult to disassociate the port of its bad reputation of contagion point. People used to call the port of Veracruz “The City of the Death”<sup>26</sup>. The success of Xalapa increased because travelers preferred to abandon the port immediately upon their arrival.

In several of the travel stories; Xalapa is referred to as the area in the “oak line”. The oak line marked the passage from the tropical zone to the temperate region. The tropics, also referred as *tierra caliente*; stretched from the Atlantic coast to the mountains of the *Sierra Madre Oriental*. The climate of the temperate region; beginning at approximately one thousand meters in elevation was cooler than the coast. As the temperature dropped so did the mosquito population and the risk of Yellow Fever.

In the stories of travelers it is evident how they showed joy and happiness of having left the tropical heat of the harbor for the “region of health”. This region of health was indicated by the oaks and was represented by Xalapa<sup>27</sup>. People wrote that in Xalapa it was possible to breathe fresh air freely. Its weather and nature was not consumed by the enervating heats. Xalapa was considered the region of evergreen forests. Its mild climate invited locals and travelers to take an early *paseo*<sup>28</sup>. In colonial times it was popular for people to walk up, down and around the central plaza or simply walk along the *Alameda*. In Xalapa the *Alameda* was the main avenue of the town which is remembered for being flanked by tall oaks<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 26-28. Also Moore, 42-43.

<sup>27</sup> Moore 19-24.

<sup>28</sup> Evening walk in English.

<sup>29</sup> Siemens, 173.

The extensive and varied vegetation is what characterizes this region. In the fields surrounding Xalapa used to grow: maize next to wheat, coffee and sugar cane, cabbages, melons and artichokes, pumpkins and onions, apples and peaches, orange, lime, grapefruit and bananas. This variety of vegetation is native to these temperate homelands<sup>30</sup>.

The allusions to Xalapa by travelers of the nineteenth century showed it as a pleasant city. Often, travelers used terms such as: Eden, A Bit of Heaven Fallen to Earth, The Land of Eternal Spring and The City of Refuge, to refer to it. William Parish Robertson<sup>31</sup> said that Xalapa is deservedly esteemed one of the most pleasant towns in Mexico. He claimed that a more delightful climate and more beautiful scenery can scarcely be imagined. In his words: “It is situated on a side hill, and is surrounded by fine graves and well cultivated fields. It contains about ten thousand inhabitants, and is celebrated for its beautiful women and flowers; which here reach the highest perfection” (Robertson 1853, 166)<sup>32</sup>. The town and its settings induce ritualistic adulation from natives and visitors until this day.

The climate of Xalapa based on foggy misty evenings showered by light rains; may not be as enjoyable for many. This apparently does not affect its paradisiacal impression. Bayard Taylor mentioned this subject in his book *Adventures in the Path of Empire*, where he says: “...it was raining, and continued to rain all day, not a slow dreary drizzle, nor a torrent of heavy drops, as rain comes to us, but a gauzy veil of moisture that scarcely stirred the grass on which it fell or shook the golden pollen from the orange flowers... We could not stroll among gardens or sit under the urns of the *Alameda*, but the towers and balconies were left us; the landscape, though

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<sup>30</sup> William Bullock, *Across Mexico in 1864-1865* (London: Macmillan 1866), 169.

<sup>31</sup> English traveler who visited Mexico in 1853.

<sup>32</sup> William Parish Robertson, *A Visit to Mexico by the West Indies, Yucatan and United States, with Observations and Adventures on the Way* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1853), 166.

faint and blurred by the filmy rain, was nearly as beautiful, and the perfume could not be washed out of the air” (Taylor 1850, 326)<sup>33</sup>.

### **Travel Hub to Trade Center**

The environment that developed in Xalapa during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth made the city have more enhancement than the port of Veracruz. For the importance acquired in the colonial period; Xalapa was declared with the title of *villa* on December 18<sup>th</sup> 1791 by decree of King Carlos I of Spain<sup>34</sup>. The title of *villa* and coat of arms provided Xalapa the creation of the first town council. This provided the city a better government and a better administration of justice.

The town was benefited with more funds for infrastructure. The authorities built two more hospitals; each with its own distinct function and patient base. The hospital of *San Fernando* was assigned to treat the troops that passed through Xalapa; while the Hospital of *San Juan de Dios* was for the general public. The patients were mainly merchants and muleteers who had contracted the Yellow Fever in the port of Veracruz and presented symptoms while traveling on the road<sup>35</sup>.

The port city of Veracruz suffered a lot especially in the period between 1790 and 1867<sup>36</sup>. These adverse circumstances included: the constant fear of foreign invasion, pirate attack and the epidemic disease. For all these reasons, Veracruz became such a dangerous place. This made

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<sup>33</sup> Bayard Taylor, *Adventures in the Path of Empire* (London: R. Bentley, 1850), 326.

<sup>34</sup> “Antecedentes Históricos”.

<sup>35</sup> Moore, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Siemens, 92.

Xalapa to replace Veracruz in its functions: as a commercial location, military base and a place of convalescence.

Xalapa began to increase its value. The Spanish government established temporary quarters for soldiers in Xalapa. The troops stationed in this area remained ready in the case of an attack on Veracruz. The government also implemented measures to protect the population of Xalapa. The city was fortified and was established a quarantine point for victims of the yellow fever in a small ranch named *Cerro Gordo* located six leagues outside Xalapa.<sup>37</sup>

Xalapa acted as a port city. It played host to any number of new arrivals. The city had a large transient and prosperous merchant population and simply had the activity one could expect of any port settlement. However, its lack of a coastline resulted in the description of the town as an inland port.

Xalapa was imposed with a massive responsibility as the surrogate of port life. It made the town evolve from an important travel hub to a center of trade. Xalapa became the new station of commercial fairs in New Spain thanks to its characteristic of inland port and its pedigree of colonial city.

The trade fairs emerged in the early eighteenth century and reached Xalapa in 1718<sup>38</sup>. With the arrival of each imperial fleet<sup>39</sup>; traders from the interior used to do business with the crews of the incoming ships to buy their goods brought from Spain. It is important to mention that a royal order declared that all Spanish shipments were only permitted to dock in the New Spain. Also, the royal order mentioned that all shipments from whatever part of the kingdom should pass

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 66, Moore, 80.

<sup>39</sup> Spanish merchant ship convoys.



through Xalapa<sup>40</sup>. For this reason the town was inundated for two or three months of traders, merchants and travelers alike.

The imported goods were mainly textile manufacture of various forms: articles made of silk, linen, cotton and wool. Also there was paper, glass products, porcelain, furniture as well as iron and steel as requirements for the country. The most popular products were: alcoholic beverages, wax, teas and salted fish. On the other hand, what the fleets took to Spain were mainly gold, silver and exotic plants like chili peppers, cacao and vanilla<sup>41</sup>.

During the fair season, the monetary profits for the *xalapeños*<sup>42</sup> came from: the accommodation of the merchants, the rent of the storage of goods and from the mule transport of those goods. As the eighteenth century progressed; the townscape filled out with new trading houses, private residences of wealthy merchants as well as new rental housing and store space. Many farmers in the surrounding areas turned from activities such as the growing of tobacco and coffee to commerce. It was evident that the tastes of the town became more sophisticated with the handling of European goods and ideas. Travelers noticed that Xalapa was French in its customs like manners, clothing and ornamentation; Spanish in its urban form and populated by a mix of colors<sup>43</sup>.

In the early nineteenth century the need for one central fair disappeared with the beginning of the liberation of trade. This situation did not eradicate the commercial and cultural character that distinguishes Xalapa until the present day.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>41</sup> Siemens, 95-96.

<sup>42</sup> Inhabitants of Xalapa.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander von Humbolt *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (London: Longman, 1911), 423.

The constant exposure to commercial traffic and transatlantic travelers during the colonial period developed among *xalapeños* a tolerance for the foreign population. Belgian, German and French populations settled to live in Xalapa. They introduced their customs and traditions to the town. In turn, Xalapa rapidly adopted these features; especially in the arts, painting, music, dance and theater. This exposure catapulted Xalapa as the setting for artistic expression of the now independent nation of Mexico.

For its artistic development; the town was publicized within the nation as a cosmopolitan inland port because. Its enhancement at the national level managed to be granted the official title of city in November 18<sup>th</sup> 1820. Three years later in 1823; Xalapa was declared Capital of the Province of Veracruz<sup>44</sup>.

As the capital city there was an important change in the townscape of Xalapa. The urban area had an irregular plan with several streets in slope. It was and still is a town of crooked streets and infinitely varied perspectives. All major streets in the *Barrio de San Francisco*, now the downtown district, were paved by 1815. The district had seventy nine blocks mostly occupied by residences<sup>45</sup>. Most of these houses were single storied, gabled and roofed with tiles. Their walls were white and their balconies in their facades were used to offer shelter from sun and rain<sup>46</sup>. The residences were designed with new architectural elements of Spanish legacy such as: spires, cupolas, facades, heavy white walls, cobbled courtyards, fountains, balconies, huge wooden doors and iron grill work. The appearance of Xalapa was conditioned to the standards of colonial architecture prevalent in Latin American cities.

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<sup>44</sup> “Antecedentes Históricos”.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Frances Erskine Calderón de la Barca, *Life in Mexico during a Residence of Two Years in that Country* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843), 395.

## New Xalapa, Old Traditions

The position of Xalapa as a center of state government, official publishing and commercial exchange attracted a wide range of professionals to the town. A new population more educated and cultured was developed in Xalapa. The city became a center of higher education; with the founding of the *Colegio Departamental de Xalapa*, the opening of the Institute of Secondary Education, the foundation of the School of Law and the University in 1874<sup>47</sup>.

One year later in 1875, the census of Xalapa reflected the diversity of middle class professions presented in the burgeoning city. Among the 14,217 residents of the city, there were many individuals engaged in professions that required considerable education for business relations. Members of the middle class included: foremen, shop keeping artisans or small traders and white-collar employees. Without question, the best represented middle class profession was that of the commercial aspect. At least 269 merchant worked in Xalapa<sup>48</sup>.

During these days, a traditional commercial aspect was the Sunday market. It was an animated scene of street trading at the central plaza. During the market day, the whole place was covered with vendors of edibles. They were seated flat on the pavement next to his or her little stock. The Sunday market was located opposite the Cathedral. It was so filled with the vendors that one had only just enough room to step between the heaped stocks in trade<sup>49</sup>.

As seen in the history of Xalapa; the city has had a strong commercial tradition. This tradition is evident especially in this duality of established shops and street trading. During the present

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<sup>47</sup> “Semblanza Económica del Municipio” (Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enríquez , November, 2009). <http://www.xalapa.gob.mx/turismos/datos-economicos/> (May 28, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid and Moore 112-114.

<sup>49</sup> Siemens, 177, 184.

day, the economic dynamics of Xalapa is based on the development of tertiary activities; highlighting the commerce feature and its diversification of industrial and artisanal trade.

A clear example of different types of commerce gathered in one place is the alley called “*El Callejon de Diamante*”. Located in Downtown Xalapa this pedestrian street exposes this duality of trade; established shops vs. street vendors. *El Callejon del Diamante* has the privilege of being situated in the cultural sector of the city. For this reason, the products offered in this place reflect the atmosphere of bohemian life.

*El Callejon del Diamante* is a reflection of years of *tradicion xalapeña*: an evening stroll through the city center, a cup of fresh toasted coffee in the afternoon, the commercial atmosphere, the cultural scene, and the artistic expression of the young population.

The bohemian atmosphere that is perceived in this alley is the result of the evolution of customs and ideas from indigenous, Spanish, French and German background which have survived for four centuries. *El Callejon del Diamante* not only represents the contemporary culture of the life of Xalapa but also its roots and history.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Present Appeal of Downtown Xalapa

A downtown landscape is a complex spatial fabric patterned by: streets, buildings, connections among pedestrian walks, squares, plazas and other public spaces, streetscapes of automobiles and buses, parking areas, transit stops and spaces between them all. Also, the landscape of the downtown is composed by non-spatial elements like: people, activity, movement, noise and even the pollution they produce<sup>50</sup>.

The center of the city is a place where social, commercial and institutional interaction is denser and more vibrant than in surrounding districts<sup>51</sup>. The center, being the oldest quarter of the city; has always contained the major entities of the local government. Traditionally, the downtown in Mexico is the most important stage for commerce and leisure within the city<sup>52</sup>. The city center is a symbol of urban identity. Despite the surging growth and the trend toward decentralization; the center remains a key component in the organization of the city<sup>53</sup>.

Downtown Xalapa, although modest in size; is compact and intensely developed. It has a high population density and little vacant land. The city center has remained diverse and vital mainly because of its bustling public life. The street life in downtown is active from early morning until late night. Despite being an old city center; people still live as well as work. Therefore, the sidewalks and streets of Downtown Xalapa tend to be always crowded; not only by the center inhabitants, but also by the rest of the city residents who are drawn to the area's business, restaurants, entertainment facilities, public spaces and stores. The city of Xalapa has a

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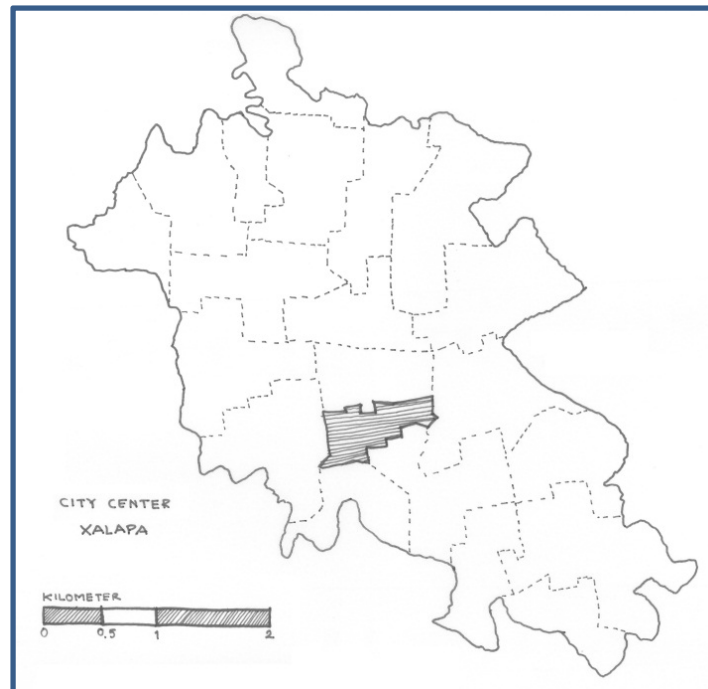
<sup>50</sup> Martin M. Pegler, *Streetscapes* (New York: Retail Reporting Corporation, Inc. 1998), 7.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel D. Arreola and James R. Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities. Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality* (Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press, 1993), 35.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

willingness to adapt itself to the modernity of the present. Its eighteenth century city center has been adjusted to new technologies and new demands of the lifestyles of its inhabitants; without losing the essence of their history and strong traditions.



**Fig.2.1: Location of the City Center in Xalapa.**

To explain why Downtown Xalapa is a vibrant district with high activity that captivates locals and visitors; this chapter will focus on the study of its urban structure, also in the cultural environment that characterizes the city and that takes place mainly in the downtown, in its touristic appeal, as well in its commercial aspect. Finally, there is a segment about the alleys in the downtown of Xalapa. This last section is because they are considered an important part of the appeal of the center and because the majority are present in the collective memory of the city inhabitants.

## The Urban Structure

Downtown Xalapa represents the early period of the town development. According to its composition; it is evident that its urban space is a compact mix of land uses. Today as in the past; the city center contains a mixed assortment of residences, retail establishments and governmental, religious and cultural institutions.

The small size of the center makes the mixed land uses to be connected in short walkable distances. This closeness causes that a large flow of people walk through its streets daily. This high density of pedestrians has become a traditional feature in the downtown life. The center was designed as a pedestrian place in pre-automobile times. Its main street, which today is known as Enriquez was established since the conquest times with dimensions suitable for pedestrians and carriages<sup>54</sup>, but centuries later with the invention of the automobile; this street was too narrow and unsuitable to support this new transportation vehicle. For its reduced dimensions; this street became impossible to use it as a two-way street. This road was broadened up to the last centimeter possible to not interfere with the facades of the existing buildings. This intervention caused the sidewalks to be reduced to the minimum; generating congested walkways all the time<sup>55</sup>. The rough layout of the city; including the variety between broad, narrow and the different kinds of irregularly aligned streets; is the most particular aspect of Downtown Xalapa.

History explains that the Spanish Colonial Administration prescribed strict rules to govern the founding of towns in the *Americas*. By the late sixteenth century and under the rule of Felipe II

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<sup>54</sup> Edmundo Sanchez Tagle, *Callejeando por el Centro Historico de Xalapa* (Xalapa: Codice Servicios Editoriales, 2002), 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

of Spain; the so called Laws of the Indies were made to ensure the regularity in the morphology of the settlements<sup>56</sup>.

This compilation of standards and procedures were intended to create a centralized and rectangular urban form. The idea was simple; the streets had to be oriented in cardinal directions and laid out in a grid. In turn, the streets had to radiate from a central square<sup>57</sup>; which would be the principal public square as well as the functional and symbolic heart of the town. Its function also included to be: the hub of commerce of the new city, especially for the Sunday Markets, the theater of public rituals and the focus of recreational activities<sup>58</sup>.

However, in the territory of Xalapa the Laws of the Indies were impossible to apply. Simply, the rugged topography of the site did not allow it. It must be remembered that Xalapa is located on the slopes of a hill. In Downtown Xalapa there are roads like Revolucion Street with a slope between ten and twelve percent or streets like Alonso Guido, Barragan, Sebastian Camacho, Nicolas Bravo and Xalapeños Ilustres which share a slope of fifteen percent. According to the information provided by the National Institute of Statics and Geography (INEGI); the city center has a slope between ten and fifteen percent in the north direction, while the slope east-west is between three and seven percent<sup>59</sup>.

The unstable topography of Xalapa produced changes and adjustments in the application of the Laws of the Indies in its urbanization. Baron Alexander von Humboldt said the city center of

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<sup>56</sup> Dora P. Crouch and Alejandro I. Mundigo, "The City Planning Ordinances of the *Laws* of the Indies Revisted," *Town Planning Review* 48 (1977): 247-268.

Zeila Nutall, "Royal Ordinances Concerning the Laying Out of New Towns," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 5 (1922): 249-254.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Violich, *Urban Planning for Latin America: The challenge of Metropolitan Growth* (Boston: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain Publishers, 1987), 79.

<sup>58</sup> Dan Stanislawski, "Early Spanish Town Planning in the New World," *Geographical Review* 37 (1965): 94, 105.

<sup>59</sup> "Aspectos Geograficos" (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2010).

<http://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/productos/default.aspx?c=265&s=inegi&upc=702825006485&pf=Prod&ef=&f=2&cl=0&tg=1&pg=0> (June 2, 2012).





Part of the ordinances of the Laws of Indies were that the church and the government offices; the two more dominant colonial institutions should be flanking the central square.

The application of these ordinances in Downtown Xalapa can be seen in the creation of a main square; which today bears the name *Plaza Lerdo*<sup>63</sup>. The physiognomy of this place has changed since its creation. Previously, in the center was located a fountain which was fed by the springs of the area. Then, it was surrounded by tall trees and had iron benches around the fountain<sup>64</sup>. Today it is only an austere space that acts as the open lobby and area of dispersal from the Cathedral which is located on the side of the square. This space is also used for the national holidays and festivities. Also, this place is commonly used to protest against the state government. The reason for this is because the Government Palace is located directly opposite.

Previously mentioned, the Cathedral is another dominant architectural symbol of the city center in Xalapa. This sanctuary is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. It was promoted officially to the rank of Cathedral of the province of Veracruz in March 1863<sup>65</sup>. This ecclesiastical institution has a curious element in the façade, or rather lacks an element. The Cathedral has only one complete tower, the other, only a small part was constructed. This event has caused much speculation; even fanciful stories to explain why there only one tower exists. According to the popular stories, the project could never be completed because there are secret tunnels beneath it. According to the legend, these tunnels make it impossible for the ground to support the total weight of the construction<sup>66</sup>. Some stories suggest that the tunnels were made by Hernan Cortes in the conquest time; to hide part of the treasure of the Aztec Empire for himself.

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<sup>63</sup> In honor of Don Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, illustrious native of Xalapa who was president of the nation from 1872 to 1876.

<sup>64</sup> Alberto Espejo, ed., *Historias, Cuentos y Leyendas de Xalapa* (Xalapa: H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional de Xalapa, 2011), 111.

<sup>65</sup> Sanchez Tagle, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Espejo, 36.

Another story assures that the tunnels were made by the Franciscans monks to sneak out of the convent-fortress where they were secluded<sup>67</sup>. The only reality is that the existence of these tunnels has never been proved.

Close to the Cathedral there is another urban landmark of Downtown Xalapa; this is the *Palacio de Gobierno*<sup>68</sup>. As stated above, it is located in front of the *Plaza Lerdo*<sup>69</sup> and the Cathedral. It was built on what once was the convent of *San Francisco* in 1830. This place was first known as City Courthouse. Next to it, the then governor Juan de la Luz Enriquez ordered the creation of a park for the enjoyment of the residents. This park is now known as *Parque Juarez*. Since its inception it had the characteristic of being adorned by tall *Araucaria* trees. These trees remain until this day.

In 1865, the state government offices, including the Governor's main office were established in the City Courthouse. Therefore, the City Council was removed and reinstalled in what previously was the house of the former Governor *Don*<sup>70</sup> Teodoro A. Dehesa. This state was located at the opposite corner of the now *Palacio de Gobierno* and opposite the *Parque Juarez*. After enlarging the property and the construction, it is now known as the *Palacio Municipal*<sup>71</sup>. These large buildings, for its architectural value and outstanding presence; are considered the most important urban landmarks of Downtown Xalapa. They express the history not only of the city but also of the population.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 36-40.

<sup>68</sup> Government Palace.

<sup>69</sup> Main square of the city.

<sup>70</sup> Mr.

<sup>71</sup> City Hall. Sanchez Tagle, 18.

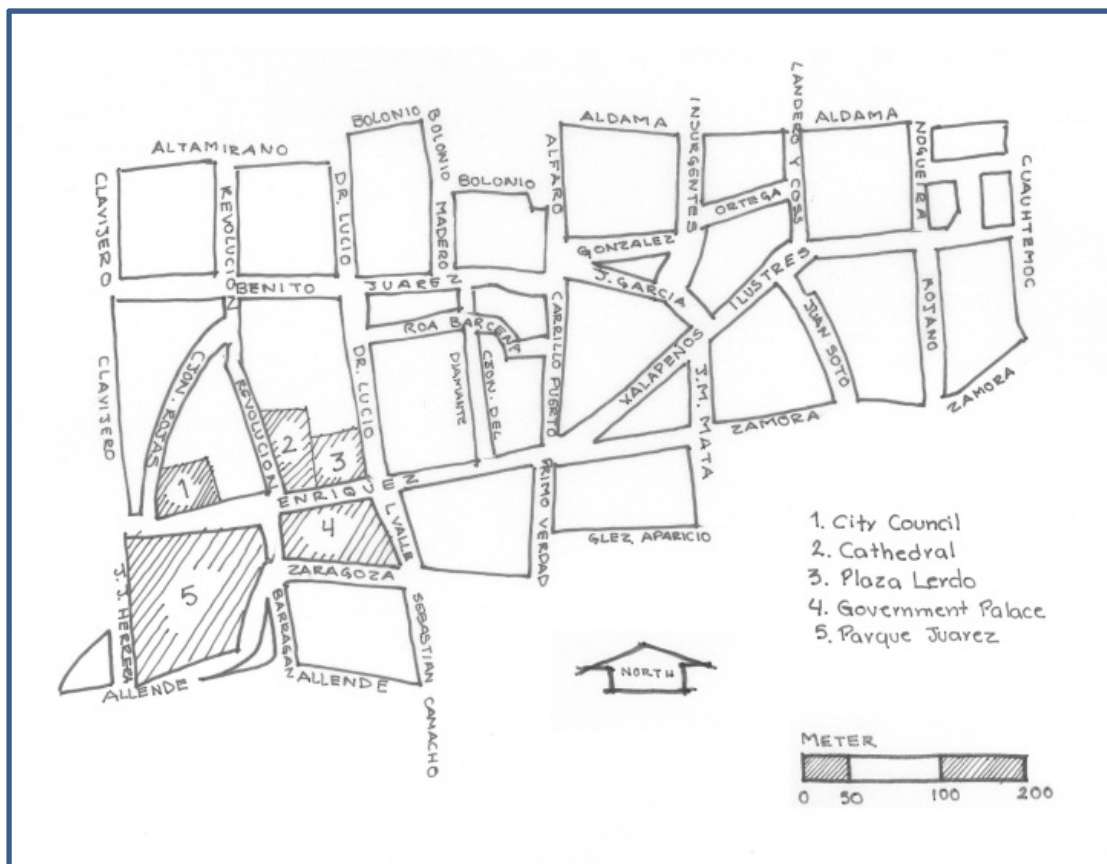
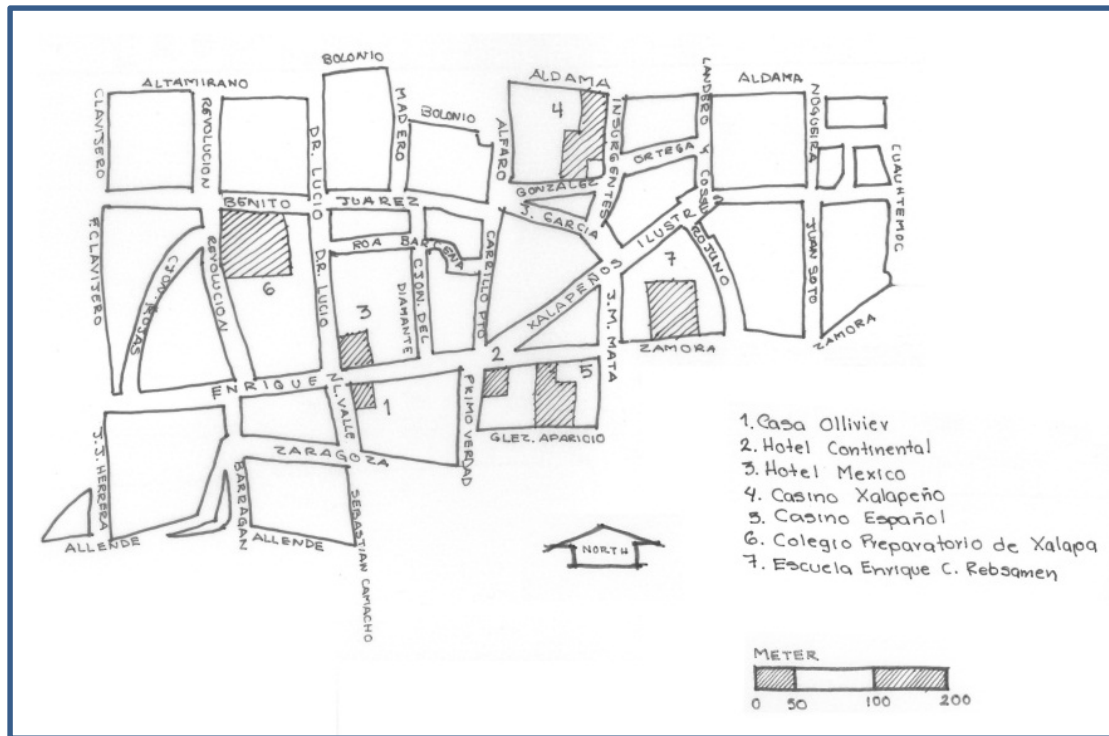


Fig. 2.3: Map of the City Center showing the location of the most important landmarks of downtown.

The splendor of Downtown Xalapa emerged in the early nineteenth century. At that time, it started the construction of buildings that so far have marked the life of the city center. Buildings like: the clothing store *Casa Ollivier*, located at the corner of Leandro Valle Street and Enriquez Avenue. This store opened its doors in 1850 and continues to run. Other examples are the Hotel Continental, which opened in 1833, is still located in the corner of Enriquez Avenue and Primo Verdad Street. The Hotel Mexico, on Lucio Street, has received guests since 1880. The *Casino Xalapeño*, which was established in 1866, and the *Casino Español* established in 1905<sup>72</sup>. The schools *Colegio Preparatorio de Xalapa*, which began to teach in 1891 and the elementary

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 11.

school Enrique C. Rebsamen founded in 1896<sup>73</sup>, all these have become part of the collective memory of the city inhabitants.



**Fig. 2.4: Map presenting the most recognizable buildings of downtown.**

The Historic Center of Xalapa comprises a total of 0.33 square kilometers. It is formed by twenty eight blocks where there are located buildings from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century<sup>74</sup>. Most of the buildings are characterized by a low, rather uniform skyline. This is due because in early period of urbanization; the availability of abundant and inexpensive land favored the horizontal expansion over vertical intensification. In fact, structures rarely exceed the four storeys. The norm in the buildings of Downtown Xalapa is two-storey<sup>75</sup>. The architecture of the buildings in downtown has very different genres and typologies. It goes from neoclassical

<sup>73</sup> Xalapa Patrimonio Cultural de Veracruz, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Karla E. Moncayo Vázquez, *Renovación de la Calle Enriquez – Centro Historico Xalapa* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2008), 27.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 121.

buildings to neo-gothic, although most of the homes and retail shops in downtown present a colonial architecture<sup>76</sup>; this latter type of architecture has contributed to the vitality that is generated in the city center. The design of the properties in colonial architecture has small dimensions in its front façade. Normally, it ranges from four to six meters long. While the length dimensions of the properties could be up to fifty meters<sup>77</sup>; this indicates that there is an average of eighty buildings per block<sup>78</sup>, each of them, with different users, function and movement. The colonial architecture allows the conglomeration of uses and activities in a small area.

Xalapa is fortunate because its city center is officially recognized by the National Institute of Anthropology and History as a Historic Center. Also, the blocks around the main square were declared monument zone<sup>79</sup> on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1990<sup>80</sup>.

However must be emphasized that the center of Xalapa, despite its overpopulation, maintains a friendly atmosphere. Downtown Xalapa involves many surprises; in each slope or each curve. The fact that the downtown follows the orography of the terrain; results in cheerful but at the same time challenging streets. The center of Xalapa evokes its colonial past. Its buildings and landscapes form a genuine and placid provincial environment with the comfort of modern life.

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<sup>76</sup> Valdivia Córdoba, 36.

<sup>77</sup> Sanchez Tagle, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Luis M. Valdivia Córdoba, *Arquitectura Contemporánea y Ecológica como Espacio Recreativo en Azoteas del Centro Histórico. Aplicación sobre el Callejon del Diamante en Xalapa, Veracruz* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2009), 74.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 40.

## The Cultural Environment

Since colonial times, the cultural reputation of Xalapa surpassed the state limits. Since the period of the fair trades in the eighteenth century; the constant interaction with other cultures produced in the city an encounter with the arts. This artistic encounter has continued demonstrating in the streets of its center until this day.

As stated by the historian Edmundo Sanchez Tagle; the *xalapeños* were always expectant to the artistic expressions that foreigners brought to their territory. Sanchez Tagle in his book *Callejonado por el Centro Histórico de Xalapa*; recounts an episode of about 1870. At the corner of the former Courthouse; there were two wooden screens mounted on one of the façade walls. In those screens, people used to advertise the plays of the theatrical companies that came from Spain on their way to Mexico City or that were returning to Europe<sup>81</sup>. Xalapa was an important travel hub in the road to the capital of the nation. It had the good fortune to enjoy all kinds of artistic displays; especially the most contemporary of the time.

Since colonial times, it was in the city center where mainly all kinds of cultural activities were developed. Therefore, the older residents of the city still held in their memories “the center” as the place for artistic demonstrations. For example, a very popular artistic expression in Xalapa is the film. The advent of silent movies was settled in the late *Salon Victoria*. This place was located next to the then newly created *Parque Juárez*; With the advent of the sound film; the *Salon Victoria* was not suitable for this new entertainment so it closed its doors. However, it rejoined with the cultural scene thirty years ago by becoming the *Agora de la Ciudad*. A memorable space dedicated to the exhibition of contemporary art<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 78.

Following the theme of the cinema in Downtown Xalapa, one of the informants, Concepción Salinas, recalls that the most fashionable movie theater for the sound film was the *Cine Radio*. It was located on Zamora Street just three blocks from the Government Palace. She mentions that by the late nineteenth forties; the movies had lasted only one week on display. Also, she recalls very enthusiastically that on Wednesdays women came for free, but what happened at the end of the function, especially on Sundays around 8 pm, was more captivating. Conchita, as she likes to be called, explains that when leaving the movie theater and if the weather permitted so, single people used to walk around *Parque Juárez*. The ritual was as follows: automatically people divided in two groups, men started to circulate in one way, while women walked in the opposite way. The exchanges of glances and smiles were entertained by the music band of the state. Conchita remembered that the band also used to serenade at the park also on Thursdays. The band was led by *Don Juan Lomán*, this character along other musicians and with the support of the *Universidad Veracruzana*; founded in 1929 the Symphony Orchestra of Xalapa<sup>83</sup>.

The orchestra with over eighty years of continuous work; has made Xalapa the headquarters of a major musical culture. In this Orchestra, many national and international musicians have found the right environment for their professional development. As well, the *Universidad Veracruzana* has supported the artistic impulse in Xalapa with its renowned Folkloric Ballet. This Ballet represents a mosaic of unique richness that encompasses the traditions of the typical dances of the state and the country; as well as dances of other Latin American countries<sup>84</sup>.

Therefore, tradition and artistic development are intertwined thus preserving the cultural prestige of the capital of Veracruz. The intense cultural and artistic movement in Downtown

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>84</sup> “Xalapa Cultural” (Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, August, 2010) [www.veracruz.com.mx/cir\\_cultura.html](http://www.veracruz.com.mx/cir_cultura.html) (June 3, 2012).



Xalapa is shown in its streets and promenades. Through institutions such as: the Federal Government, the City Council, the *Universidad Veracruzana* and its faculty of Fine Arts, the Institute of Culture of Veracruz, the Secretary Office of Education and Culture, the System for the Development of the Family and various private institutions of an independent artistic movement; they all promote activities of interaction with the arts and culture, especially for the young population. These institutions achieve it through: workshops, concerts, meetings, exhibitions, courses, cuisine and the possibility of linking with literature, music, theater, dance, visual arts and gastronomy<sup>85</sup>.

These activities are developed mainly in spaces of the Historic Center such as the *Pinacoteca* Diego Rivera. This place besides exhibiting the work of contemporary artists in the visual arts is the host of 36 works of the Diego Rivera collection. Other examples are the *Galeria de Arte Contemporaneo*, *Galeria Ramon Alva de la Canal* and *Galeria Independiente* Marie-Louise Ferrari. These places have the function to present the most representative of the national and international plastic in the fields of painting, photography and sculpture. The *Centro Cultural Los Lagos*, formerly known as *Casa de las Artesanias*, exhibits art featuring the artistic community of Xalapa and the state. The *Agora de la Ciudad* is a center dedicated to the diffusion of music, dance, theater and literature. Regarding the dissemination and exhibition of the traditions in Xalapa are the *Museo Casa Xalapa* and *El Patio Muñoz*. These two places are rehabilitated colonial houses which provide the inhabitants cultural events like fandangos<sup>86</sup>, painting and scenic art courses<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> “El Sentido Cultural de Xalapa” (Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enriquez, May, 2011) [www.xalapamio.com/atractivos.html](http://www.xalapamio.com/atractivos.html) (June 1, 2012).

<sup>86</sup> Traditional dances.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



## The Touristic Appeal

In present days, the Historic Center of Xalapa has generated a new type of tourism. The so-called cultural tourism is focused on enjoying the traditions, gastronomy, architecture and culture of a society<sup>89</sup>. This new type of alternative tourism, which has gained strength in Mexico since the decade of the eighties<sup>90</sup>; has promoted the creative, urban and ethnographic ambience of Xalapa to the World.

In Xalapa, national and international tourists enjoy its discreet charms. For example: the strolling of its colonial narrow streets, the outdoor concerts of the Symphony Orchestra at *Parque Juarez*, the visits to its museums and galleries, or simply to enjoy the mild weather while tasting the traditional cuisine in the patio of one of the restaurants or *cafes*<sup>91</sup> of the city center.

Drinking a cup of coffee in the afternoon is a tradition in Xalapa. Therefore, any tourist in their visit has to follow this ritual. Fortunately for them, there is at least one coffee shop in every block around the Cathedral and the main square *Plaza Lerdo*. The reason for this is the cold weather invites to taste a cup of coffee to enjoy the low temperatures of the afternoon and night.

The crafts in Downtown Xalapa are represented in the famous *dulces de las monjas*<sup>92</sup>. These candies, also called *jamoncillo*, are traditional candies of the state Veracruz made of pumpkin seeds. The presentation of the candies can be in stock form, colored or in form of fruits and animals. These candies are handmade by the nuns of the former convent of *El Calvario*. Its point of sale is located at the corner of Primo Verdad Street and Zamora Street. The fun fact about

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<sup>89</sup> Ernesto Sodi Pallares, *Turismo Cultural: Paseos Turisticos Culturales* (Mexico City: La Prensa División Comercial, 1983), 34.

<sup>90</sup> Luis C. Herrero Prieto, *Turismo Cultural: El Patrimonio Histórico como Fuente de Riqueza* (Valladolid: Fundación de Patrimonio Histórico de Castilla y León, 2000), 25.

<sup>91</sup> Coffee shops.

<sup>92</sup> Candies of the nuns.

them is that some people prefer to leave them instead of eat them; with the purpose to not break the harmony of these little pieces of sweet art.

Other handicrafts include mainly jewelry, lucky charms and cotton clothing made by local craftsmen. This merchandise has the feature to capture the interests of locals and visitors for its attractive colors and designs.

On the other hand, Xalapa also has a very active religious tourism which is primarily developed by believers of the Catholic faith. The city has a revered saint Monsignor Rafael Guizar y Valencia; the fifth bishop of Veracruz in 1919<sup>93</sup>. Canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006<sup>94</sup>, is the first Mexican and Latin America bishop to be declared a saint. Therefore, the Catholic population of Xalapa celebrates every October the feast day of Guizar y Valencia in the Cathedral; the place where his remains lie. These festivities attract believers not only from the state of Veracruz but from around the country that recognizes and revere his virtues and miracles.

Xalapa's city center offers a variety of touristic sites and rich environments result from authentic expressions of history, various ages of architecture and landscapes, museums, parks, gardens, galleries and alleys. The quality of its urban-architectural space is one of the principal elements that have favored the rapid development of tourism in the city over the past fifteen years. Its charm out of the ordinary provides tourists the opportunity to find the perfect shot for a souvenir photograph.

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<sup>93</sup> Sanchez Tagle, 96.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

## The Commercial Aspect

The Historic Center of Xalapa has passed through a lot of history in its commercial environment. In this aspect, the most relevant precedents are the fairs of the merchant fleet from the early eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century tradition of the Sunday Market, also known as *tianguis*. The Sunday Market was installed in the main square, now *Plaza Lerdo*, by merchants or peasants that used to come to the city to sell what they had harvested in their lands. The flowers, fruits or vegetables were offered on blankets spread over the pavement of the square. The tradition of the one day *tianguis* continues not only in Xalapa but in the rest of the Mexican cities. In present days, the *tianguis* in Xalapa is not anymore established on the *Plaza Lerdo*. In 1872, the City Council assigned a specific site to set the mobile market on the outskirts of the city<sup>95</sup>, where until this day remains.

By the early twentieth century, the city center of Xalapa began to gain impulse in its commercial sense. Since those days, the commercial landscape of the center has reflected the dynamism of the city, the daily interaction of its inhabitants and has exhibited richness in visual diversity emphasized by colors, smells and movement.

It is very common that in most of the cities of Mexico; the central district becomes a highly commercial area<sup>96</sup>. Xalapa is no exception, for example around the central square can be found services such as: banking, governmental and private offices, diverse retail shops, coffee shops and restaurants. These establishments continue to multiply in the rest of the Historic Center. But because the center is compact in dimension, the entire commercial area is in a walking distance. This is very convenient for the pedestrians, traders, buyers and visitors. This situation has led to form a close community among downtown merchants. This merchant community remains until

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<sup>95</sup> Moncayo Vázquez, 71.

<sup>96</sup> Arreola and Curtis, 119.

this day. Through it, we can find anecdotes and stories about the previous commercial landscape of the center.

According to *Don Carlos Welsh*, barber by profession and established in the center for more than fifty three years; mentions that the city center nowadays is not different from the one of the last century. He comments that his father used to tell him stories about the center around the decade of the nineteenth thirties. He said that the newspapers from Mexico City were sold on what is now the Government Palace. The newspapers arrived twenty four hours late because they used to travel all night long by train and arrived in Xalapa at dawn. Also Mr. Welsh refers to the other traditional commerce in Xalapa, the *cafes*. He mentions that a very famous one was the *Café Estadio*. It was located just next to the Cathedral. He recalls that it lasted until the decade of the sixties. Regarding the commerce in Enriquez Avenue; he says that the street used to be called Principal. In it were located the most elegant shops of the city. They were so elegant that the employees used to attend all dressed up in tuxedos; like in *Casa Ollivier* with its French-style ornamentation.

This story allows us to compare the old with the new Xalapa. We can see that still exist and are functioning commercial establishments of strong tradition of the city. Especially the restaurants and *cafes* like: *Café La Parroquia*, which is a franchise of the popular café in the Port of Veracruz, as well as the restaurants *Casona del Beaterio* y *Tortas La Naval*. All these establishments have been serving the population of Xalapa since the beginning of the twentieth century. It is evident that the center has managed to endure the modernity under an atmosphere proud of its past and loyal to its traditions.

However, there is another type of commerce also popular and characteristic of the city center, the street vendors. In Mexican cities, informal outdoor selling is very popular. Normally, the sidewalks of the city center host a variety of individual businesses including: shoeshine stands, bookstalls, lottery outlets and food vendors. The latter is very popular especially in late evenings. These vendors ply their products from stationary booths and push carts.

These singular commercial units contribute not only to the commercial landscape, but to the street life of the city center. Nevertheless, the fact that street vendors take over the sidewalks; hinders the circulation of the still narrow walking paths.

The street vendors are the result of a cultural meaning. They are products of a deeply rooted custom and tradition of the ancient *tianguis*. The reasons of why they are located in the streets are mainly because the products they sell do not occupy that much space. The street vendors claim that it is not suitable for them to be in a commercial establishment and that they prefer the informal booths or stalls. Many would think that this type of informal trade is profitable because they are not paying any taxes, rent or other services. Notwithstanding, each of them need a special permit from the City Council and also they have to pay a fee, similar to a tax, for the place where they are located. Authorities are aware that the informal commerce has become very difficult to eradicate. The current unstable economy of Mexico and the unemployment situation of the country do not help this process. For that reason, municipal authorities have started control programs around street vendors to benefit merchants, the population and even the landscape of the city center.

Part of these control programs for the informal commerce, is the relocation of the street stalls in rehabilitated properties of the city center. These new places have the function of

conglomerating the stalls in one site; thus freeing the streets and sidewalks of the downtown.

Examples of this initiative in Downtown Xalapa are the *Plaza Clavijero* on Lucio Street and the *Puerta de Alcalá* on Enriquez Avenue.

It is evident that the daily movement of the center of Xalapa is created mainly by its commerce. It is this aspect that provides the life and the meaning to the landscape of the Historic Center. Still tradition is what continues to define the downtown. The most important thing is that in it; still can be perceived an atmosphere of old provincial commerce that distinguishes it from the other cities in the state.

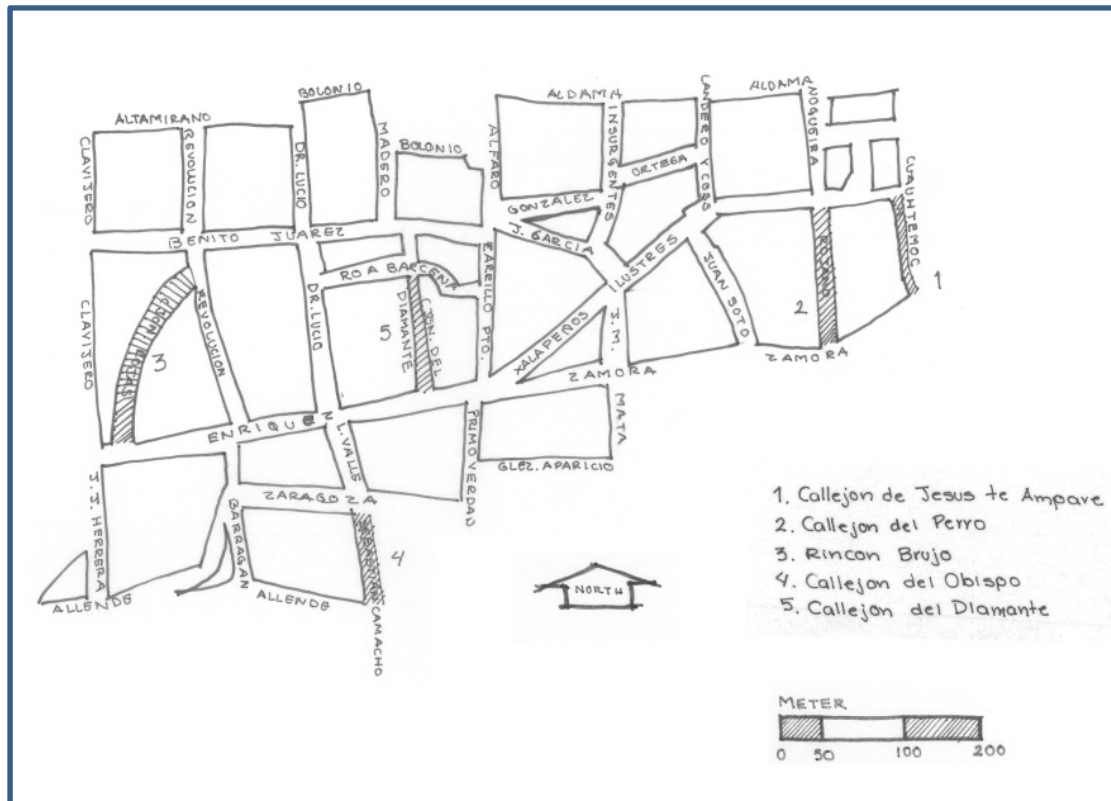
### **Alleys in Downtown**

In the Downtown of Xalapa remain streets and alleys of strong colonial stamp. These are simply bits of the past. Urban spaces of quiet nostalgia, surrounded by cozy homes with red tiles in their roofs and colorful flowers on their balconies. They all print a past ambience that refuses to leave; that resist the deterioration of the present and does not bow to the threats of the globalized future.

Because Xalapa was developed in a very rugged terrain; the majority of its alleys took an irregular shape and are in sloping. The alleys in the city center were created at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Back then, some blocks of the downtown were occupied by large properties. These used to have secondary entrances mainly for their carriages. These entrances created lanes that divided the blocks normally in two sections. Over time and with the division of the large properties into small pieces of land; these paths provided the opportunity to create more



properties per block. These paths remain as roads in the city, but according to their narrow dimensions, the City Council determined in 1942<sup>97</sup> to be used exclusively for pedestrians.



**Fig. 2.6: Map displaying the location of the alleys in downtown.**

Although all the *callejones*<sup>98</sup> in Downtown Xalapa were created with the same purpose; each has its own style, ambience and anatomy. Some are more boisterous, others are more quiet, but because of their particular urban structure; they all appear to keep the essence of old Xalapa. This makes each of them to hold legends or stories that are already part of the popular culture in the city.

<sup>97</sup> Moncayo Vázquez, 115.

98 Alleys.

For example the legend of the *Callejon de Jesus te Ampare*; where its name evokes an event of the times where Xalapa was still a villa. The legend says that a Spanish family lived in that alley. The eldest daughter had a boyfriend named Cosme de Taboada. The young couple had the habit to talk until night hours, the girl from her window, while the young man standing on the street. One day a drunk resented by his wife's death, to see the happiness of the lovers, repeatedly stabbed Cosme. When the neighbors heard the cries of the young woman, came to the rescue. Unfortunately it was too late; the boy had died. The neighbors could only express Cosme, *que Jesus te ampare*<sup>99</sup>. Since then, the alley maintains this phrase from that tragic incident<sup>100</sup>.

Another one is the *Callejon del Perro*<sup>101</sup> that is how Rojano Street is recognized in the downtown. Its story is told like this; there lived a family of two spouses and their dog Capitan. One night a tramp wanted to enter the house. Capitan by trying to defend its house and its owners attacked the villain. During this struggle, Capitan was hurt while the crook fled the scene. What the surprise was that Capitan had bitten part of the intruder's wallet. In his muzzle was part of a letter with the address of the thief that led to his capture.

Some alleys hold a much darker story like the mystical *Rincon Brujo*; located in the Rojas Street. Residents tell that previously lived a man whose appearance was more like a gorilla than a human being. This was some kind of curse, because according to the legend, in his youth he had found a treasure which he never shared with anyone; because of his greed he transformed himself<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> That Jesus protects you.

<sup>100</sup> Martin Cerón Cortés and Liliana Nafete Flores, ed., *Leyendas de Xalapa, Relatos y Narraciones* (Mexico City: Editora Leega, 2007), 40.

<sup>101</sup> The dog's alley.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 42.

Others are stories about the crazy inhabitants. For example the *Callejon del Obispo*<sup>103</sup> on what is now known as Sebastian Camacho Street. In it lived a man who used to sell fruits and vegetables. Neighbors refer that one day the man lost his mind and began to tell everyone that he had become a bishop. He even dressed as such and used to give alms to the passers. This character became famous for the follies he preached; over time the alley where he lived took the name of the bishop<sup>104</sup>.

But the most tragic legend raised in one of the alleys of Downtown Xalapa is of *El Callejon del Diamante*<sup>105</sup>. In this alley it is said that several years ago lived an attractive young woman who was married to a wealthy Spanish businessmen. He had given his wife a diamond ring, which she promised never to take away. The husband had a partner who was like a brother to him. With the constant visits, the partner and the wife developed a feeling of love and began a torrid romance. One day, the woman left the ring in the house of his lover. When the husband went to visit his friend, he saw the ring. At that moment he discovered his wife's infidelity and the betrayal of his friend. Enraged, the man ran to his house and in revenge murdered his unfaithful wife. Since then, inhabitants of Xalapa have called the site where the house was located as *El Callejon del Diamante*<sup>106</sup>.

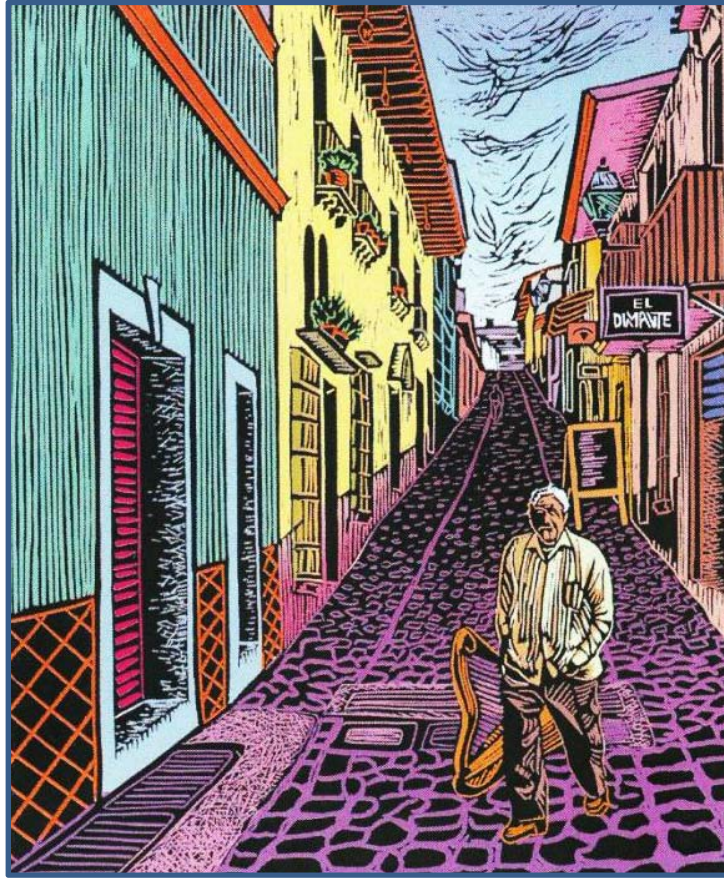
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<sup>103</sup> The bishop's alley.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>105</sup> The diamond's alley.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 38-41.



**Fig. 2.7: Callejon del Diamante. Illustration courtesy of Carlos Garibay Millan.**

This is the most famous and popular alley in the downtown not only for its legend, but for what takes place in it now- Especially in the touristic, commercial and cultural aspect that produces and brings vitality to the Historic Center. For being a landmark of the center of Xalapa; this research paper will do a Cultural Landscape Study on this particular alley.

## CHAPTER THREE

### El Callejon del Diamante

#### Location of the Alley

In the city center of Xalapa there is a very popular alley among locals and visitors. It is a narrow pedestrian street flanked by houses along its length. This open-air pedestrian walkaway has the official name of Jose Maria de Rivera Street. In the eighteenth century it was recognized as the alley of Domingo *el Portugues*<sup>107</sup>. However in present days, locals refer to it as *El Callejon del Diamante*.

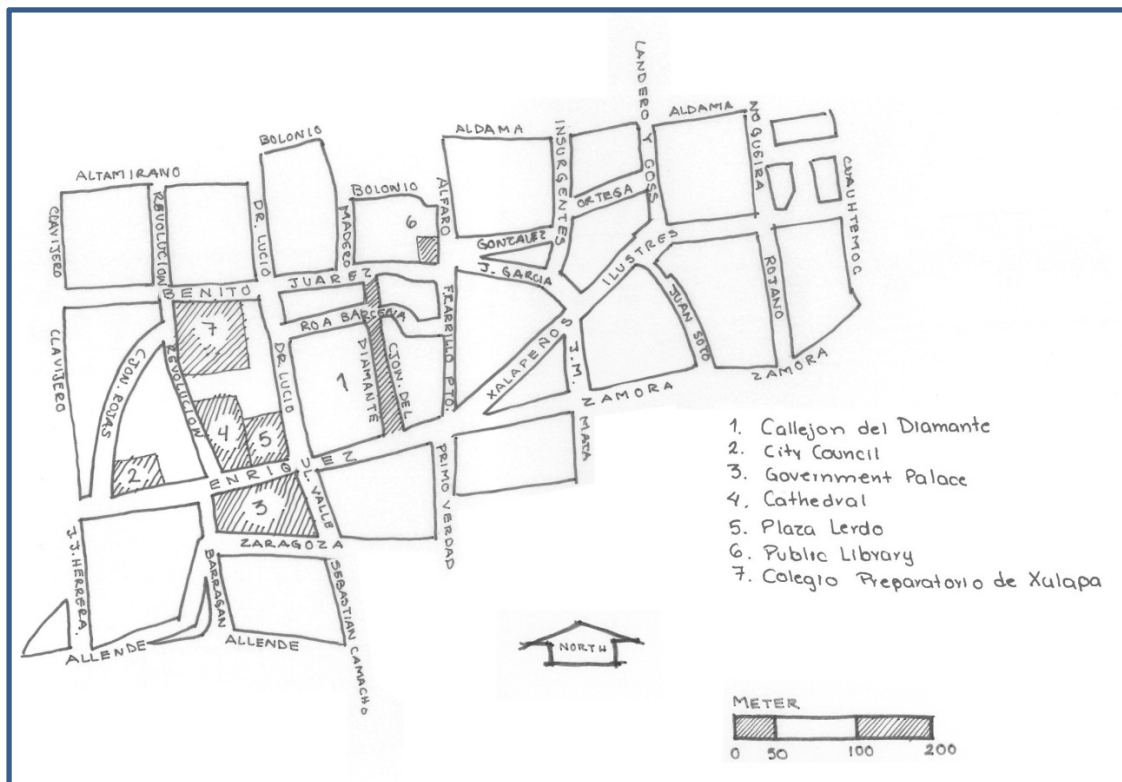


**Fig. 3.1:** El Callejon del Diamante. 2010, Digital Image. Available from: Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enriquez, <http://www.xalapa.gob.mx/turismos/callejon-diamante/> (accessed June 10, 2012).

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<sup>107</sup> Sanchez Tagle., 21.

For its popularity, this site is considered one of the most famous landmarks of the city. The alley has remarkably narrow dimensions; therefore it has no vehicular traffic. The alley is a pedestrian street that links two important arteries of the city. *El Callejon del Diamante* is located between Enriquez Avenue and Benito Juarez Street. On Enriquez Avenue one can find in its sidewalks: the City Hall, the Government Palace, the Cathedral and *Plaza Lerdo*; while in the Benito Juarez Street hosts in its sidewalks the Public Library and the *Colegio Preparatorio de Xalapa*.



**Fig. 3.2:** Map of the City Center indicating the important buildings near El Callejon del Diamante.

## Origins of the Alley

By late nineteenth century, the properties around the alley belonged to *Don Juan de la Luz Enriquez*, the State Governor. Over time, the properties were sold. In present day, only one

property remains with the Enriquez family. That property is located in number twenty six of the alley and is occupied by *Doña*<sup>108</sup> Esperanza Enriquez Vallejo, granddaughter of the former Governor.

Since its origins, the properties of the alley were intended for housing. It was until early twentieth century when it began to change the land use of this place<sup>109</sup>. Most of the residential buildings in the alley were modified to accommodate commerce on the ground floor; while the upper floor was intended for residential use.

The first commerce established in the alley was the *Meson del Alferez* in 1923<sup>110</sup>. This modest hostel used to be located in the building with number fifteen of the alley. During that time, the other businesses that were established there were mainly small restaurants, but it also had a tailoring shop and a shoemaker workshop<sup>111</sup>.

In 1930, it was settled at number thirty two of the alley; the radio station XEJA and XEFA<sup>112</sup>. In those days, the alley presented different problems. The area was used for commercial land use and when the night came the shops normally closed. This place turned into a lonely, dark space that was susceptible to vandalism and illegal activities. The struggles of its inhabitants under these circumstances were evident. They used to claim the City Council for security and surveillance during the night period<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Mrs.

<sup>109</sup> Valdivia Córdova, 71.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Sanchez Tagle, 22.

<sup>113</sup> Valdivia Córdova, 86.



The night atmosphere of the alley changed in the seventies. In it were established night clubs, or discos. Among them were the very trendy Obelis Club and the Bartola night club. The first openly gay night club in the city was established in the alley in 1978<sup>114</sup>.



**Fig. 3.3: El Callejon del Diamante. 1980, Digital Image. Available from: Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enriquez, <http://www.xalapa.gob.mx/turismos/callejon-diamante/> (accessed June 10, 2012).**

The opening of these nightclubs made the neighbors present their dissatisfaction to the high volume of the music, the garbage, the noise and the disorder caused by the drunks. Therefore, the neighbors formed a Patronage for the Conservation of the Built Heritage of *El Callejon del Diamante* in 1980<sup>115</sup>. Next year, the patronage achieved the closure of these three nightclubs. The goals of the patronage were the cleaning and hygiene of the alley, the order of its commercial establishments and the use of this site for family entertainment. This patronage of neighbors disintegrated after the death of its founder *Don Julio Serrano Cazorla*. Therefore, the maintenance issues and the establishment of order in the architecture of the alley passed to the municipal

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<sup>114</sup> Silvia Salinas, informant.

<sup>115</sup> Valdivia Córdova, 90.



authority<sup>116</sup>. In the absence of action by the City Council, the alley became again a lonely dark place. So by the early nineties, most of the buildings were uninhabited because of their disrepair.

### Transformation of the Alley

After the dissolution of the Patronage for the Conservation of the Built Heritage of *El Callejon del Diamante*; the City Council and the department of public works launched an initiative to renovate the urban image of the alley<sup>117</sup>. In the investigation made by the municipal authorities it was evident the high commercial demand generated in this alley. *El Callejon de Diamante* became the perfect scenario to increase the touristic and economic development not only of the alley itself but to the Historic Center of Xalapa.



**Fig. 3.4: El Callejon del Diamante. 1991, Digital Image. Available from: Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enriquez, <http://www.xalapa.gob.mx/turismos/callejon-diamante/> (accessed June 10, 2012).**

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Moncayo Vázquez, 43.

The renovation of *El Callejon del Diamante* started in March 1993<sup>118</sup>. The City Council wanted to erase the image of vices and illegal activities surrounding the alley in the decades of the seventies and eighties. The City Council wanted to continue the labor of *Don Julio Serrano* and his patronage. They wanted a street capable of entertaining, socializing and connecting the families and visitors of Xalapa. The main purpose of the initiative was to create a place suitable for all the audiences; with activities in the morning, afternoon and at night. The initiative was meant to create a lively street to become a landmark of the downtown.

The initiative of the City Council meant to convert the alley into a commercial pedestrian street and a tourist spot. Since its beginning, the objective of this initiative was achieved. The commerce in this alley has become a hallmark not only of the downtown but of the city. In present days, the alley is a point that is characterized for evoking the image of the prehispanic *tianguis*<sup>119</sup>. In it are mainly sold handicrafts and artisan jewelry, but also contain spaces to taste the regional gastronomy. Currently, this commercial aspect identifies and provides a strong presence of this alley. Since its renovation, *El Callejon del Diamante* has operated as a scenario that generates cultural exchange. In it coexist people from different social status, urban tribes, professions, occupations, ideologies, backgrounds and origins. This mix environment makes *El Callejon del Diamante* an urban space with an animated, lively, colorful, bustling, and active environment. These features have helped produce the alley to turn into a major tourist attraction in the city center.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Sunday Market or traditional market.



**Fig. 3.5 and 3.6: The current commercial environment of El Callejon del Diamante.**

### **Components of the Alley**

Presently, the buildings in the alley are mainly commercial. The majority of its buildings share the land uses; using the ground floor for commerce while the upper floor for residential use.

Some other buildings are completely commercial, while other constructions use the ground floor for commerce and the upper floor for storing. However, in spite of being a major commercial and tourist point in downtown, there still are in the alley fully residential buildings.

To know more about the atmosphere of *El Callejon del Diamante*, on July 17th 2012, all street-facing, ground-level commercial activities and residential buildings were counted and mapped. The survey was based largely on observation with interviews in some shops of the alley. No attempt was made to gain access to the upper floors of buildings. Businesses in residential units were listed as a separate category.

The results of a detailed land use inventory conducted in *El Callejon del Diamante* are presented in the next images showing the exact location of each component of the alley. The components of the alley are: established shops, street stalls and residences.

In total, thirty six retail establishments were identified in the alley. An additional three residential units and two apartment buildings were also recorded. Thirty one street vendors were recounted and ten mixed land use buildings<sup>120</sup> were listed. These numbers illustrate the mix of land use patterns and the components that contain *El Callejon del Diamante*.

### **The Established Shops**

To facilitate the analysis, the established retail shops were grouped into seven categories:

| <b>Category</b>          | <b>Number of elements in the alley</b> |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Crafts shops          | 9                                      |
| 2. Clothing stores       | 4                                      |
| 3. Handmade jewelry shop | 6                                      |
| 4. Restaurants           | 7                                      |
| 5. Cafes                 | 2                                      |
| 6. Tattoo shops          | 4                                      |
| 7. Other goods           | 4                                      |

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<sup>120</sup> Commerce at ground floor with residence on the upper floor.

Representative “other goods” businesses were a bookstore, a New Age items store, painting workshop and a legal office.

The description of the formal trade in the alley is the following. Starting with the left side from the entrance on Enriquez Avenue there is:

| <b>Name of the establishment</b> | <b>Description</b>                              |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>La Fonda</i>                  | Regional food restaurant                        |
| <i>Tierra Verde</i>              | T-shirt shop                                    |
| <i>Colibri</i>                   | Wood-based craft store                          |
| <i>La Sopa</i>                   | Regional food restaurant                        |
| <i>Diamante</i>                  | Crafts shop                                     |
| <i>Ojo de Tigre</i>              | Shop of crafts from Coatepec, Xico and Naolinco |
| <i>El Sol</i>                    | Shop of crafts from of the State of Veracruz    |
| <i>Rojo Factoria</i>             | Airbrush art workshop                           |
| King Master                      | T-shirt shop                                    |
| Lola                             | Henna tattoo shop                               |
| Black and Blue                   | New Age items shop                              |
| <i>Codigo Zodiaco</i>            | Astrological library                            |
| Shady Tattoo                     | Tattoo shop                                     |
| <i>El Sol y la Luna</i>          | Ceramic-based craft shop                        |
| Artesa                           | Crafts shop                                     |
| <i>Corazon Corazon</i>           | Crafts shop                                     |
| <i>Las Carnitas</i>              | Mexican food restaurant                         |
| Cheaper                          | Imported goods store                            |

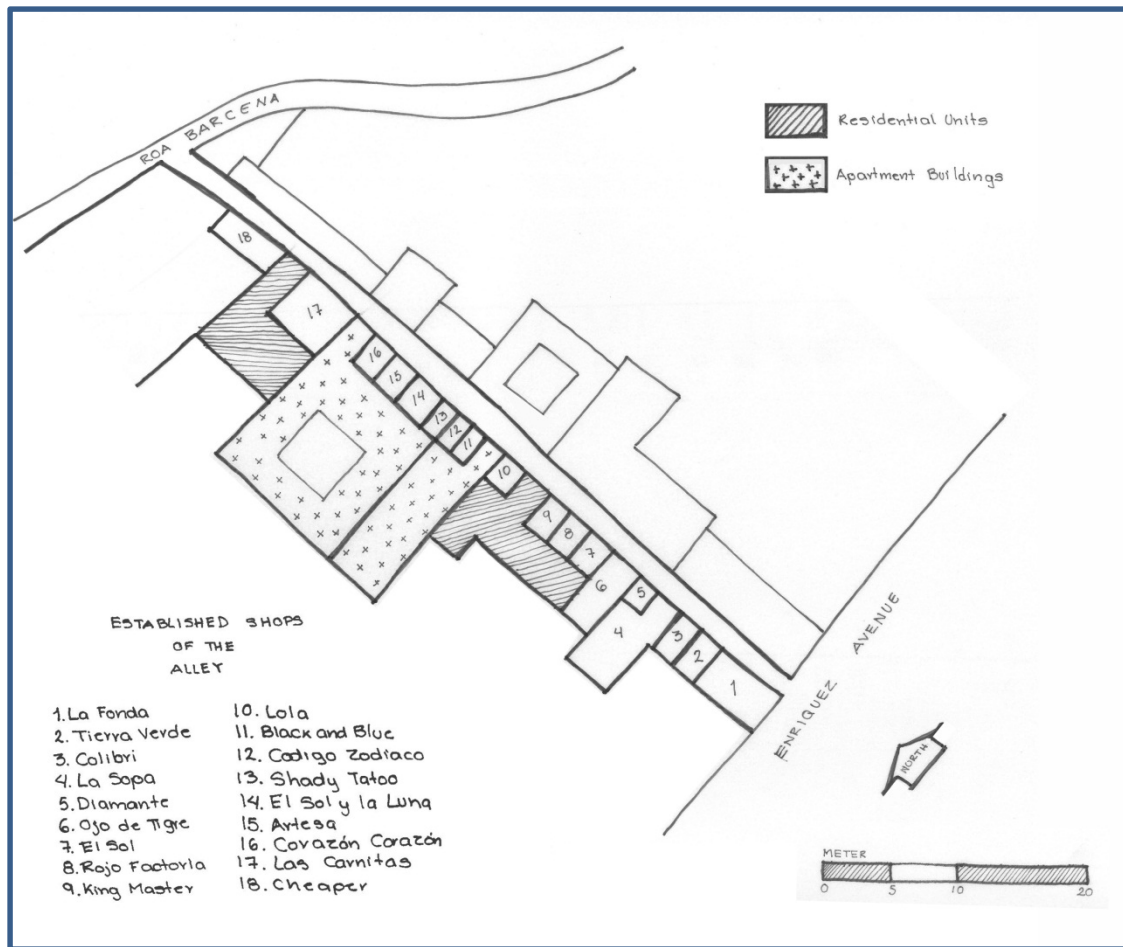
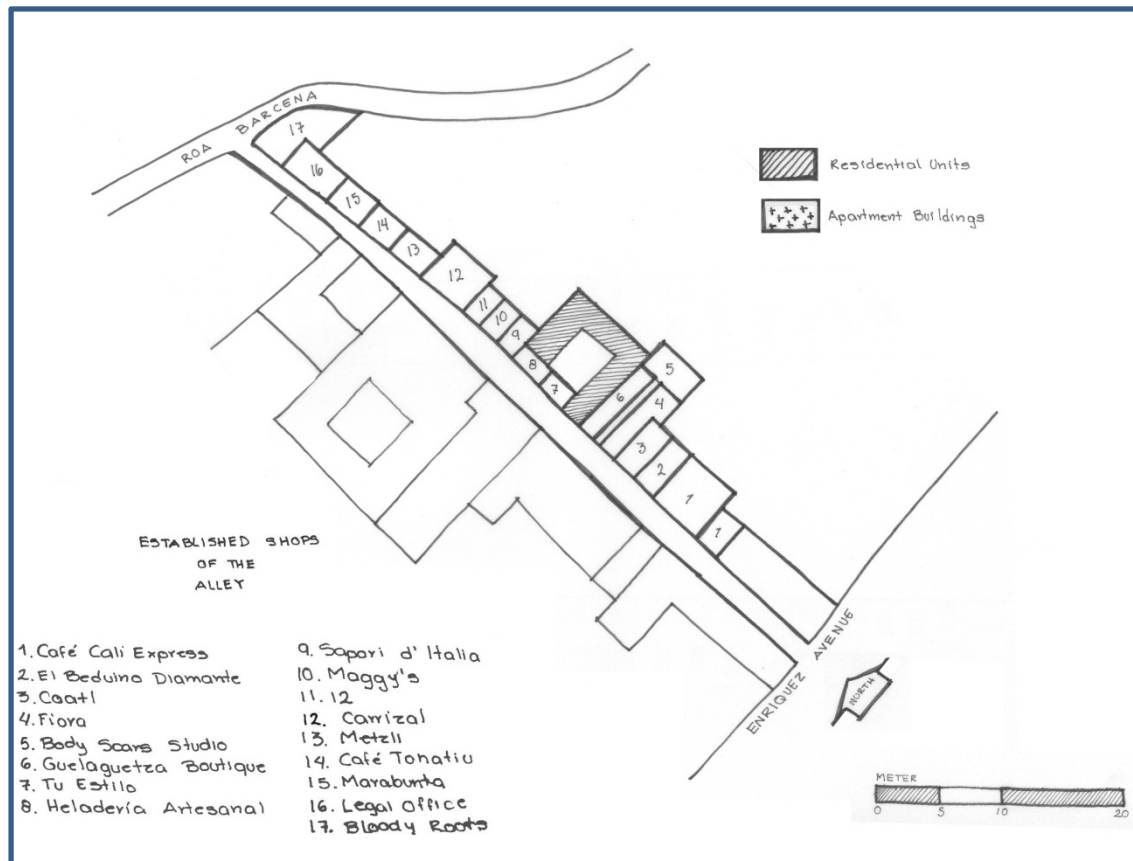


Fig. 3.7: Map of El Callejon del Diamante presenting the location of the components of one side of the alley.

The establishments starting with the right side from Enriquez Avenue are:

| Name of the establishment  | Description                                 |
|----------------------------|---|
| Cali Express               | Coffee shop                                 |
| <i>El Beduino Diamante</i> | Mexican food restaurant                     |
| Coatl                      | Handmade jewelry store                      |
| Fiora                      | Jewelry made with miniature natural flowers |
| Body Scars Studio          | Tattoo shop                                 |
| Guelaguetza Boutique       | Handmade clothing store                     |
| <i>Tu Estilo</i>           | Silver-based jewelry store                  |

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Heladeria Artesanal</i> | Ice cream shop                             |
| Sapori d'Italia            | Pizza Restaurant                           |
| Maggy's                    | Regional rood restaurant                   |
| 12                         | Regional costumes shop                     |
| Carrizal                   | Cotton clothing store                      |
| Metzli                     | Handmade crafts, jewelry and clothing shop |
| <i>Cafe Tonatiu</i>        | Coffee and crafts shop                     |
| Marabunta                  | Organic clothing store                     |
| Legal Office               | Esteban Garcia Cruz, Attorney              |
| Bloody Roots               | Tattoo shop                                |



**Fig. 3.8: Map of El Callejon del Diamante presenting the location of the components of the opposite side.**

The majority of the established businesses in this alley are crafts shops. The goods sold in those places are primarily: handmade jewelry, cotton clothing and handmade decorative items of ceramic, wood and glass.

The distribution patterns of these established retail shops varied widely, as some type of establishments were dispersed while others were clustered. Businesses most likely to cluster included the three categories of crafts shop, restaurants and cafes. These are concentrated at the entrance of the alley on Enriquez Avenue.

In *El Callejon del Diamante*, the established shops are housed in colonial architecture buildings. The built heritage is evident in the facades. Some of the renovations of the buildings have been done with delicacy and concern for the architectural integrity of the street; following the indications of the Patronage for the Conservation of the Built Heritage of *El Callejon del Diamante*<sup>121</sup>.

It is evident that the shop fronts were modernized. Now they are simply and elegantly understated to coexist with the original buildings. The architecture of the alley nowadays is based on gracious old buildings; mainly residences that have gone commercial<sup>122</sup>. Usually they have few exterior embellishments. They are all painted in a warm yellow color with balconies dripping foliage and flowers.

As the cultural landscape reveals, the patrimonial roots of the Spanish colonial period legacy run deep in this urban space. As mentioned previously, the front of the buildings in the alley are completely narrow. This smallness enhances the visual diversity at the ground level of the alley, featuring shops and artisan stalls.

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<sup>121</sup> Valdivia Córdova, 94.

<sup>122</sup> Xalapa Patrimonio Cultural de Veracruz, 56.



The retail establishments are typically built flush with the sidewalk and open to the street in mall like fashion. Many shops have open fronts instead of doors. This is to encourage browsing and to facilitate opportunities for shopkeepers to lure visitors and customers inside. Shopkeepers do their best to make their businesses to stand out from the rest.



**Fig. 3.9 and 3.10: Openness of the established shops in the alley.**

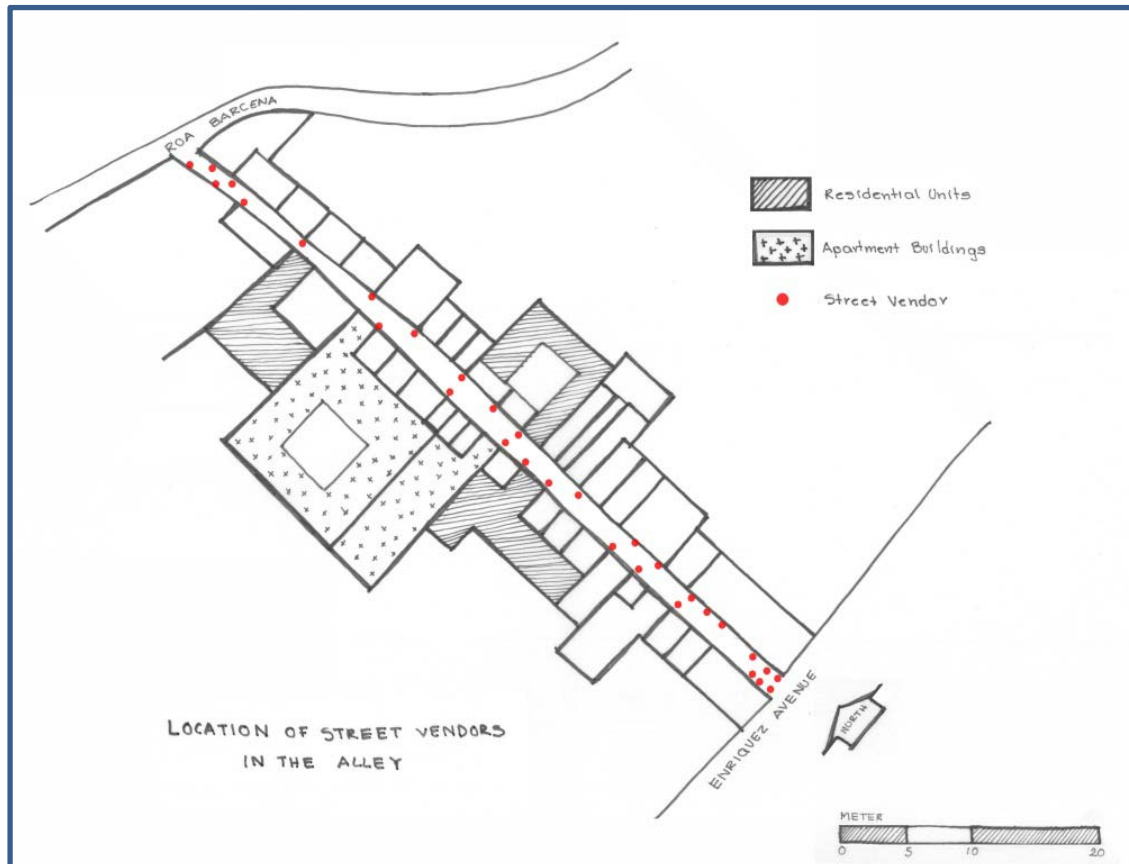
### **The Street Vendors**

Another important component of the alley is the street trading. The street vendors are located in the facades of the buildings along the crowded sidewalks of this narrow street. In *El Callejon del Diamante*, on average for each established shop there is one street stall. They operate out of makeshift stands or spread their wares out on blankets.



**Fig. 3.11 and 3.12: Different types of street vendors in the alley.**

The street vendors sell mainly handmade jewelry. The artisans make bracelets, necklaces, earrings, key chains and lucky charms using semi-precious stones like: quartz, onyx, jade, murano glass, amber and turquoise; and metals like: silver and stainless steel wire.



**Fig. 3.13: Map of El Callejon del Diamante indicating the location of street vendors.**

The artisans who manufacture these pieces are the same sellers. They do not have workshops to create their designs. They produce their goods in the alley, sitting next to their street stalls. For production they only need their materials and tools. Part of the appeal of the street vendors is that while the visitor is looking at their creations; at the same time he can observe the production process.





**Fig. 3.14: Artisan creating his own merchandise.**

The street vendors have a semi-permanent location in the alley. They arrive every day at nine o'clock in the morning. As soon as possible, they install their stalls with elements such as a plastic fold down table, a couple of plastic seats and umbrellas to cover their area from the sun or the rain. In Xalapa it commonly rains in the afternoons most of the year. Hence, the street vendors always carry pieces of plastic cloth to cover their stalls and goods.



**Fig. 3.15 and 3.16: Makeshift stalls of the alley.**

The alley is illuminated during the night. However, each informal stall has an electric power connection. This connection allows them to illuminate with more light bulbs their stalls and products; it also allows them to connect stereos or radios so they can listen to music.



**Fig. 3.17: Makeshift stalls illuminated at night.**

At nine o'clock in the evening most of the downtown businesses are closed. During this time, the street vendors pick up their stalls. They keep and transport their wares on suitcases, backpacks and plastic bags. This makes it easier to carry around. Only the cafes and restaurants remain open in the alley until eleven o'clock at night.

### **The Interaction between Permanent Business and Street Trading**

In terms of cultural landscape, this urban space is the result of the interaction between people and their background, and how they have manipulated this place as they please. *El Callejon del Diamante* is an enacted environment; where according to the urban planner James Rojas, is the

way people use the space between buildings. To understand the enacted environment of the alley, one must examine people as users and creators of a place through their behavior patterns<sup>123</sup>.

The way in how currently the alley is organized is the reflection of struggles, triumphs and everyday habits of the working class in Xalapa. Each shop in *El Callejon del Diamante*, whether established businesses or informal commerce, is a vignette of the individual life of the artisans and the owners.

The set of commerce and the way they are organized; turn this rite of trading into a civic showcase that continues to serve as a source of tradition, community pride and identity. What is experienced in the alley, its ambience, vitality and movement is the consequence of the popular culture of its traders and users. This culture includes the beliefs and practices rooted in local traditions. *El Callejon del Diamante* is a reinterpretation of the tradition of the *tianguis*. The *tianguis* was the traditional type of trade of the prehispanic period in Mexico that with the arrival of the Spaniards, took aspects of the bazaars of the Middle East.



Fig. 3.18 and 3.19: The alley resembling the ancient tianguis.

<sup>123</sup> James Rojas, "Streets and Yards of East Los Angeles," in *Everyday America. Cultural Landscape Studies after J.B. Jackson*, ed. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 278.



This *tianguis* appearance produces that the pedestrian public space of the alley becomes a social space. The creation of activity and the increase of social interaction are encouraged by the outdoor sales areas, storefronts and the sidewalk cafes and restaurants.



**Fig. 3.20: The sidewalk cafes in the alley.**

However, this modern *tianguis* that is developed in the alley forms a particular streetscape. The way the street vendors are organized; which invades the pedestrian path, produces crowding and chaos on the alley. Also, every street vendor covers part of the facades of the formal shops. Added to this, there are the signs and advertisements of every business in the alley causing visual chaos. The shop owners make their business stand out from the surrounding competition by using colorful signs and advertising outside their shops, and by showing their colorful wares to the public. They perform this technique to attract customers. At the same time, they are aware of the interruption they can produce on the flow of the pedestrian path.



**Fig. 3.21 and 3.22: Each business in the alley tries its best to stand out from the rest.**

This mix between people, products, stalls and signs creates a sense of refuge in the visitors. This sense of refuge produces comfort, security, and confidence in the people's self-esteem<sup>124</sup>. This sensation makes people develop a place without the worry of being observed, monitored or judged. Every component of *El Callejon del Diamante* reduces the exposure of their visitors offering them a sense of refuge through the overcrowded environment.

<sup>124</sup> Fernando Núñez, Carlos Arvizu and Ramon Abonce, *Space and Place in the Mexican Landscape. The Evolution of a Colonial City* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2007), 20-23.





**Fig. 3.23: The overcrowded environment of the alley.**

Scientifically proven, people do not want to feel overwhelmed, but at the same time people get bored easily. People are always constantly looking for variety. People are looking for a place that provides further exploration to maintain their interest. People seek involvement in their environments<sup>125</sup>. This is what *El Callejon del Diamante* provides.

The alley generates mystery. The mystery incorporates complexity into the anticipation of future experience<sup>126</sup>. The mystery produced by *El Callejon del Diamante* in its visitors is based on what new information they are going to acquire if they go deeper in it.

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<sup>125</sup> Crankshaw, 8.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 9.

## The Architectural Patterns of the Old Houses in the Alley

The buildings located in *El Callejon del Diamante* are two-storey high houses of the colonial period made of clay bricks. These materials, which are thick, solid and enduring, were used to provide the construction security and shelter mainly to the climatic threats<sup>127</sup>.

In the alley, most of the buildings have been renovated in the twentieth century<sup>128</sup>. Therefore, the constructive details in all the buildings are very similar. The roof is pitched, and it is covered with red tiles manufactured in the neighbor state of Puebla. Most of the walls are now made of masonry. The floors are now covered with mosaic and tiles. The mezzanines were reconstructed and made of concrete. The beams holding the mezzanine are commonly made of cedar wood. Regarding the exterior, the facades are traditional to the colonial period. All the windows in the façades are in vertical shape with a height of 1.8 meters. The upper floor windows are adorned with cast iron balconies painted black<sup>129</sup>.

However, small details like window and door frames are enthusiastically painted in color<sup>130</sup>. The color has been an important element of Mexican architecture. In *El Callejon del Diamante*, the facades of the colonial houses are now colorful and bright. All the buildings share the same warm yellow color. This, according to the regulations of the Patronage for the Conservation of the Built Heritage of *El Callejon del Diamante*, create a harmony, uniformity and order in the urban image of the place.

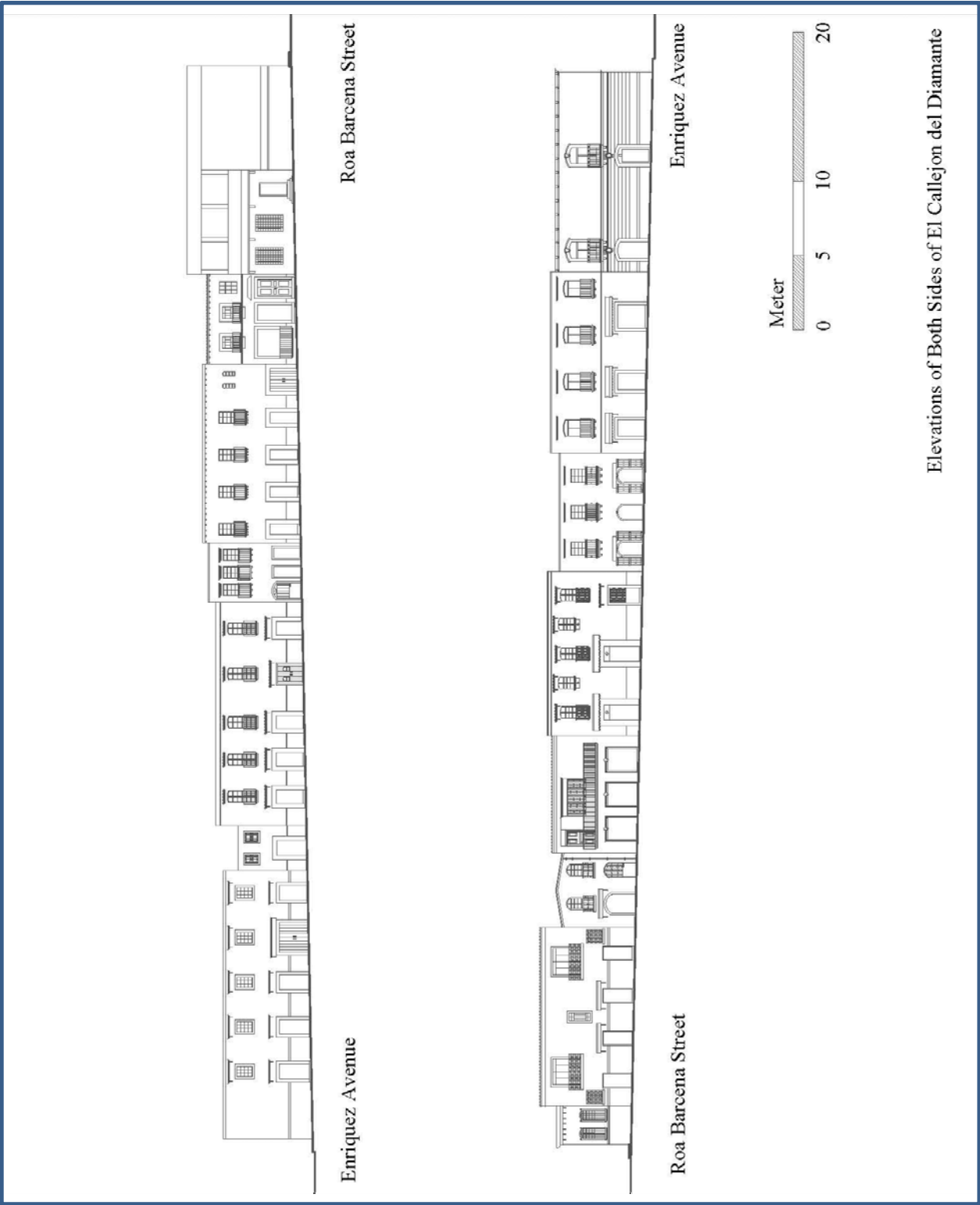
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<sup>127</sup> Moncayo Vázquez, 41.

<sup>128</sup> Iohana B. Mariscal Maldonado, *Propuesta Arquitectonica y de Mejoramiento de la Imagen Urbana en el Centro Historico de Xalapa*(Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2009), 37.

<sup>129</sup> Valdivia Córdoba, 96.

<sup>130</sup> Fernando Núñez, Carlos Arvizu and Ramon Abonce, 25.



## The Control of the Urban Image of the Alley

On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1993, the Mayor Román Mora Santiago, inaugurated the renovation of *El Callejon del Diamante*<sup>131</sup>. This new phase of the alley produced important changes in the existing residences. All the buildings with residential use were modified to provide each of them an entrance from the alley. Like previously mentioned, some of the residences are developed in the upper floor of the buildings. These type of residences have just the main door on the level street. The rest of their properties at ground floor are used for commerce. Other residences just have the main entrance on the alley. They connect their properties with the alley through a narrow hallway. This is because the rooms facing the alley were sold for commercial use, while the rest of the building, the back section, has become the residence itself. This division provides them privacy and calmness from the noise generated in the alley.

As can be seen, strong modifications were made on the buildings to develop the new image of *El Callejon del Diamante*. The new image of the alley was based on treating the space as a nostalgic artifact simulating its glory days of the colonial period<sup>132</sup>. This type of simulation was made according to a historic and aesthetic model that many historical cities have used to conserve and highlight the traditional form of the streets<sup>133</sup>. This simulation was made in order to gratify the expectations mainly of tourists.

The idea of the new project in the alley was to create an environment from a perfect scene. Everything was neat and calculated, so the alley could provide the perfect experience for the visitors. However, what was created was a monotonous space. A very different picture to what we see now.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>133</sup> Zeynep Çelik, Diane Favro and Richard Ingersoll ed. *Streets. Critical Perspectives on Public Space* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 1994), 6.

The renovation initiative stipulated that all the buildings in the alley had to share the same color of painting in the facades. The design and color of the iron work of the balconies had to be similar. The numbering of each of the buildings made identical signals for the entire alley. The business signs with their names were all fabricated in the same design of old and rusty appearance. The City Council wanted to create a controlled appearance over the alley. It must be recognized that all these elements are still preserved in the alley. However, some other elements have been incorporated.



**Fig. 3.24 and 3.25: The uniform urban image of the alley can be perceived only at night.**

Throughout the years, every resident and merchant of the alley gradually changed the uniform aesthetics established by the local authorities. Each of them modified in their own way their shop fronts by using signs, ornamentation, plants and even their own products.

The signs play an important role in the new appearance of the alley. The use of signs in *El Callejon del Diamante* is anything but calculated. However, they do not produce a negative image of the quality of the alley landscape. On the contrary, the set of signs produces a pleasant lack of coordination that livens up the space. The richly textured visual landscape produced by

the signs; enhances the enacted environment of the alley<sup>134</sup>. Many signs do add to marginal incomes, but more important they reflect cultural traditions and individual initiative rather than a corporate sales strategy. Every sign has its individual graphic designs and style. Each sign expresses its difference in color and shape. These private signs in the alley turn into public art that serve to attract customers<sup>135</sup>.



**Fig. 3.26: The display of the signs in the alley.**

With these modifications, the shop owners now truly appropriate their buildings and provide a new ambience to the alley. With the arrival of the street vendors; they simply appropriate the pedestrian path. The combination of advertisements, merchandise and makeshift stalls create a set of planes in the alley developing a more complex and crowded environment.

This set of planes as an appropriation of the space by the users of the alley determined the current streetscape of *El Callejon del Diamante*. The streetscape of this place is beyond the monotonous look of orchestrated facades of the buildings. The streetscape of the alley is

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<sup>134</sup> Rojas, 284.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 192.

complemented with: the advertisements, the color of the crafts displayed, the fabric of the handmade clothes, the lights in the shops, and the textures of the artisan jewelry of the street vendors. This whole collection creates a unique and memorable look for the visitor.

J.B. Jackson wrote: “the older I grow and the longer I look at landscapes and seek to understand them, the more convinced I am that their beauty is not simply as aspect but their very essence and that the beauty derives from human presence”<sup>136</sup>.

More than just the buildings and street stalls are the graphics, the billboards, the display windows, the colors and lights, the composition of shapes and forms, shadows and highlights, the materials and textures that tell stories about the people living, working, shopping and eating there, their way of life, their time, history, place and their culture.

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<sup>136</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, “J.B. Jackson and the Discovery of the American Landscape,” in *Landscape in Sight: looking at America. John Brinckerhoff Jackson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), X.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Life in El Callejon del Diamante

In *El Callejon del Diamante* what makes the place significant is not so much its architecture, as the events which takes place in it. The alley has become a space for rituals; like: strolling, shopping, and dinning. All this rituals are essential to the cultural process of the alley and the city center. Rituals have a peculiar way of influencing the existing spaces and then subsequently determining the character of the space<sup>137</sup>. The ritual use of this alley is now lodged in the collective memory of the city inhabitants.

The original intention of the alley was to serve as a place for business and tourism. These characteristics however, connect it organically with the everyday life of the city. Because of its location, the alley allows the integration of every dwelling, building, resident, shopkeeper, and street vendor into the life of the downtown. This integration is due to the rituals and experiences. These experiences are from small social and commercial opportunities to larger gatherings for locals and visitors.

The experiences have occurred because the perception of the cultural landscape of the alley has not been static. It has been shaped over time by the people in it and the things those people have done, and by previous commerce and previous attractions. The alley has been changing because the society is changing. The society is seeking to adapt to new ways of working and of filling in leisure time. These changes in the daily rhythms of life have been associated with a

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<sup>137</sup> Çelik, 4.



more modern way of living and therefore have important weight in the appreciation of the quality of the daily lives of the people<sup>138</sup>.

The alley as we know it today, in a few years can completely change its use and appearance. Similar to what happened almost twenty years ago: from being a lonely and abandoned place to being a landmark of the city center.

Nevertheless, every landscape embodies values, traditions and experiences which have a long-lasting influence in its users<sup>139</sup>. The power that an environment possesses to generate affection and respect derives from having accepted its change of function. This invites us to appreciate *El Callejon del Diamante*. The alley is not just a place, it is a set of rituals that take place in a public space. Maybe this alley can disappear tomorrow, but this alley will remain rooted in the collective memory of the city.

### **Appeal of the Alley**

Folkloric narratives of oral storytellers with deep roots in the life and landscape of a particular location is a way of structuring and interpreting geographically related memory and experience. This kind of narratives generates an immediate access to the meanings that people read in the landscapes where they are located<sup>140</sup>. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz suggests that is the fulfillment of every society the need to narrate a story about itself<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>138</sup> Nuñez, Arvizu and Abonce, 143.

<sup>139</sup> Jeffrey W. Limerick, "Basic Brincksmanship. Impressions Left in a Youthful Mind," in *Everyday America. Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, ed. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 138.

<sup>140</sup> Ryden, 195.

<sup>141</sup> Çelik, 4.

As previously mentioned in chapter two, *El Callejon del Diamante* has its own legend. This story is so well known by the city inhabitants that the alley is popularly recognized by the name derived from the legend. These brief tales of ordinary people who unexpectedly find themselves involved in embarrassing, violent and sometimes traumatic events, mark that precise place. These stories provide them distinction, character and personality.

This distinction is present at the entrance of *El Callejon del Diamante* from Enriquez Avenue. A plaque with the legend of the alley in Spanish, English and French language is located there. The main function of the plaque is thus primarily the same as that of any public monument. The plaque announce to those who see it that the something relevant happened in the alley.



**Fig. 4.1: El Callejon del Diamante. 2010, Digital Image. Available from: Gobierno Municipal de Xalapa de Enriquez, <http://www.xalapa.gob.mx/turismos/callejon-diamante/> (accessed June 10, 2012).**

A few steps from the entrance, there is also a mural made of *talavera*<sup>142</sup> tiles. This mural has written the legend of *El Callejon del Diamante* in Spanish with a perspective image of the alley.



**Fig. 4.2 and 4.3: Mural located at the entrance with the legend of El Callejon del Diamante.**

The community who works and lives in it are proud to share it with the rest of the population and see this event as part of their identity. It is the conservation of these stories that binds the people into the land.

Currently in *El Callejon del Diamante*, the appeal of the place is focused on the services that the alley provides. What makes it so unique today is the vitality of its ambience derived from the retail scene, the coexistence between users, shopkeepers and street vendors, and the daily passage of locals and tourists.

<sup>142</sup> Ceramic tiles produced in the region of Puebla, Mexico.

The goods and products of the shops and street stalls exposed along the pedestrian area plays an important role in the vitality of the alley. The merchandise seems to gush out from the street level shops so too the wares of the artisans and street vendors. At first glance, the alley may seem chaotic and unstructured, but these bring variety to it. Its chaos and disorder have not removed the appeal of the alley. In fact, its untidy appearance has become an invitation to explore it.

The environment that developed in the alley surpassed the expectations of the original project. The basic idea was to create some kind of consumer land attraction. The project was devised in an orderly environment. However, the advent and the proliferation of the street vendors forced the merchants of the established businesses to make their stores to stand out. They did it by using bigger and eye catching signs and by displaying their wares outside their shops. So this caused the cluttered environment which ultimately has become its best appeal. The result is the addition of more color and texture to the streetscape.



**Fig. 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6: Goods and products exposed outside the shops to attract customers.**

The retail scene in *El Callejon del Diamante* is described as a mix of transients and natives, buyers and sellers, workers and employees, people in search for leisure and excitement all foregathered in one colorful and alive environment surrounded by colonial buildings in the city center of Xalapa.

The alley has displayed a social character in keeping with the best traditions of the Mexican outdoor public plaza. The plaza is a micro arena of human interaction and group participation. It is described as an important and intimate part in the work life of the city<sup>143</sup>. Because of this interaction, the whole area is brought to life.

It is evident that the alley resembles the Mexican *plaza*. The alley reflects the essence of an exciting and stylish part of the town where monotony is banished. It is not a show street in terms of architecture. It is not bordered by expensive and fashionable shops. The public which frequents it at every hour of the day and night is not a ritzy public. However, this place has something that catches the attention of the public and makes it stand out from the rest of the downtown.



**Fig. 4.7 and 4.8: The high activity of the alley.**

<sup>143</sup> Arreola and Curtis, 138.

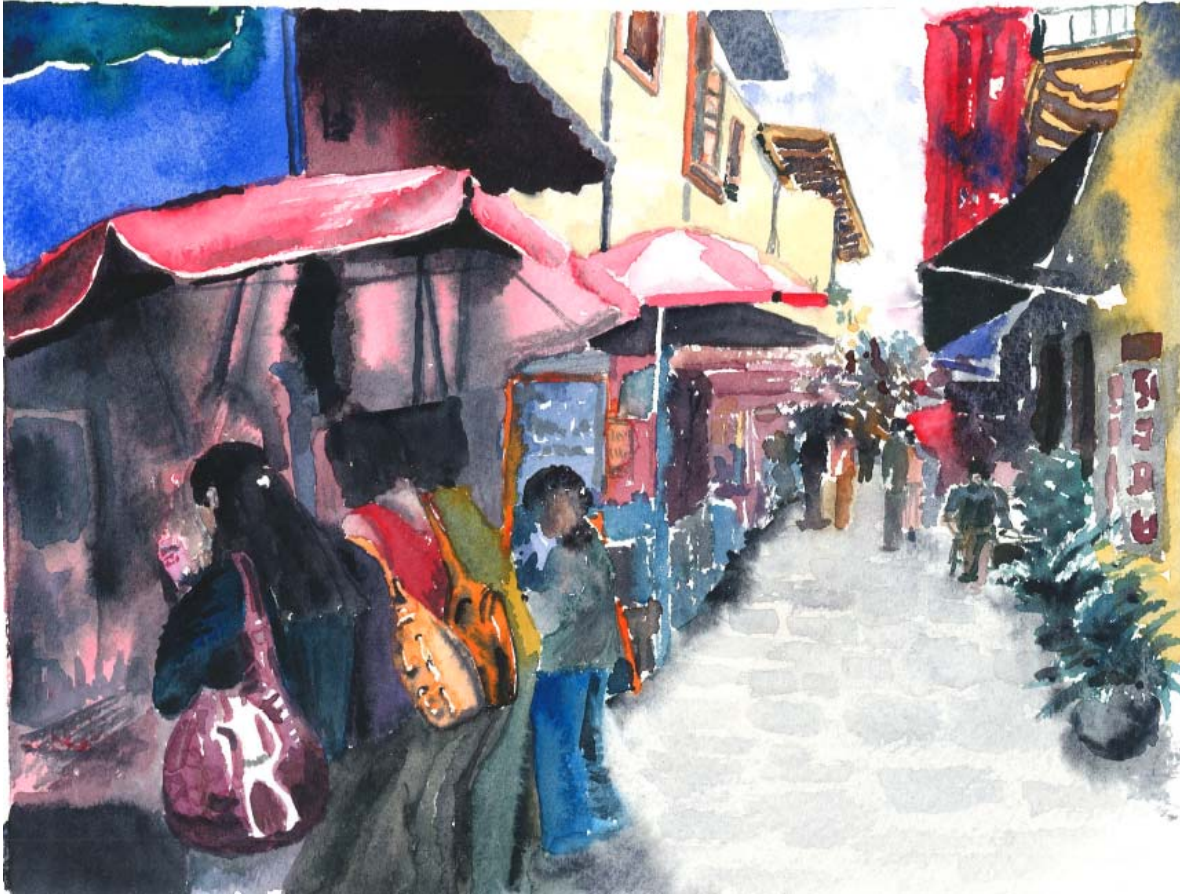


It is visited by men, women, children, rich and poor, strangers and natives. The people go up and down on it gawking the light shining from the facades of the buildings, listening to the sounds of music and relishing the smells of food and coffee. Everywhere in the alley are strange and delightful impressions.

The continued vitality of the alley is related in part because of its length of almost eighty meters. This critical distance of open space and recreational amenities comprises activity that together with the colorful parade of visitors and customers generates a vibrant almost carnival-like atmosphere that is akin to an amusement park for shoppers.

The path that is more fun, entertaining and amusing people are most disposed to stroll it. People consider the alley a journey far from tedious. The alley turns into a pleasant and fluid daily trip. This alley is used not only for shoppers and tourists but for passers who want to take a shortcut in the city center. It should not be surprising that passersby constitute a relevant group of the users given the location of the alley in Downtown Xalapa. The alley is an important pedestrian hub in the city center.

The alley is not a boring place. It is a place to go when you are looking for a good time or a escape from the everyday. It is a place for oriented for the diversion and pageantry of the community. Its less-glamorous function as a daily social concourse has been crucial in the economic life and development of the city center.



**Fig. 4.9: El Callejon del Diamante.**

Presently, what the alley provides to the society is:

- The culture and the labor of regional artisans.
- A place where local artisans can be expressed.
- A space where people of all ages can interact.
- A place to converge modern ideas and old traditions.
- The renewal of the urban image of the city center.
- The highlight of the cultural and historical values that characterize this part of the city.
- A place for commercial and leisure activities.

## Interviews with Visitors of the Alley

Art and photography may reveal the physical appearance of a place in a way that maps cannot. They may capture something of the mood and meaning of that place, but their range is limited. They capture a moment, a facet, but they lack of the discursive and explanatory depth of the words<sup>144</sup>.

Words are well-suited to reveal the depth and range of meaning that a place holds for those who are familiar with it. Words allow people who have had enough experience and of and in a place to enable them to transcend the cartographic imagination<sup>145</sup>.

The viewpoint of outsiders who come into a place with little prior knowledge of, or thought about, what they are going to see is limited. Such viewers will frequently be limited to largely aesthetic impressions. They will comment on how the local landscape fits in with their notions of what makes for pretty or ugly scenery and leave it like that<sup>146</sup>. Therefore, to better understand the essence of a place it should be through its users. The city of Xalapa lends identity to its inhabitants. The city is shaped by them. It embodies their memory and personifies their spirit.

The best examination of the architecture in *El Callejon del Diamante* is through the collective memory of the place. The collective memory is how the people experience and remember the environment through existing spaces, forms and details. This environmental memory embraces not only visible and perceptible elements, but also even ritual sequences<sup>147</sup>.

Kevin Lynch, who has studied urban perception extensively, says that environmental images are the result of a bilateral process between the observer and the environment. The observer,

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<sup>144</sup> Ryden., 40.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Nuñez, Arvizu and Abonce, 36.



through its experience in the environment, chooses, organizes and gives meaning to what he is seeing<sup>148</sup>. According to Lynch, the observer regroups and reorganizes the elements he perceives and establishes a landscape structure that facilitates the development of a coherent mental image. For the observer this mental image will continually change over time. This image will become part of the experience of the person and the process for learning about the built environment of that place<sup>149</sup>. The image thus created directly influences the behavior of the observer and his patterns. For example, some activities tend to be repeated in well-known areas while other activities are avoided in unknown spaces. From this we can infer that the environmental memory motivates and leads the observer in its daily activities. In *El Callejon del Diamante*, the environmental memory will suggest the choice of where to shop, where to go for entertainment, where to eat and how to travel from home to the alley and vice-versa.

The images formed by the environmental memory of the users of the alley express a combination of characteristics such as how often the person have visited the city center, the repeated use of the alley, the pleasant or unpleasant feeling associated with this urban space and the motivation for using this reference point as a daily route.

Therefore for this research paper, a series of interviews were conducted with people who were in the alley. The purpose of these interviews was to penetrate the environmental memory of the respondents. The aim was to obtain evidence of why this place and its shops are very popular in the downtown and why is stroll everyday not only by locals but also by visitors.

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<sup>148</sup> Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1960), 57-59.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 59-62.

Thirty people visiting the alley were interviewed. These interviews were anonymous, so in this research paper the respondents are going to be identified according to the number assigned on the day of the interview.

The results were as follows:

The respondents were divided in three groups: customers of the shops, tourists and passersby.

From the group of customers of the shops:

- Thirteen respondents were customers of the shops.

From the group of tourists:

- Nine respondents were tourists.
- Seven tourists were visiting the alley for the first time.
- Two tourists were visiting the alley and the city for the third time.
- Six tourists were Mexican.
- Two tourists were from the United States.
- One tourist was from Germany.

From the group of passerby:

- Eight respondents were passersby.

The interviews to the group of tourists:

When they were asked how did they find out about the alley, some responded:

Participant #5: “On a website about visiting Xalapa, recommended to visit the alley.”

Participant #13: “A friend, who lived in the city years ago, always spoke of this place.”

Participant #22: “We were just walking down the streets and we saw the stalls and that encourage us to enter.”

Another question was what aspects of this urban space attracted them. Some answered:

Participant #5: “The colorful of all the crafts, especially the shawls of this store. I love them. I’m taking one to my mother.”

Participant #12: “Well, it is a nice place where you can buy souvenirs and crafts made by the locals. The prices are really good comparing to other city centers in Mexico I’ve been to. What I liked most is to see the guys doing their creations here on the street. Here you can buy handmade jewelry and at the same time, you can see how they are doing it.”

Participant #22: “It caught our attention the number of people coming in and out of the alley. It is a very narrow space to have so many stores. You walk and walk and there are more stores and stalls ahead.”

The next question was what shops or street stalls in the alley did they like the most. Some responses were:

Participant #8: “*La Sopa*, the restaurant at the beginning of the alley. It is really good and the prices are cheap also. I liked a lot.”

Participant #13: “Metzli and the store next to it. They really have beautiful embroidered clothing there. These two have many crafts of vibrant colors. It is really attractive to look.”

Participant #22: “Well, there is a guy at the end of the alley that has interesting designs of necklaces and earrings, like more modern and original. Also, I liked the *Cafe Cali*. We walked in because the smell of coffee was really good. They have a nice environment in Cali.”

The last question was would they recommend *El Callejon del Diamante* to other people. They answered:

Participant #5: “Yes, in fact I have a blog where mainly I write about my travels. This alley definitely will have a place in it. It is like a surprise of the city center.”

Participant #8: “Of course, there is plenty to see. The alley is narrow and short but all these shops entertain you. I like the idea that this place is also used by the young people to showcase and sell their products. It is nice in here. I really enjoy the diversity of the alley.”

Participant #12: “Sure, the funny thing here is that although many of the street vendors sell handmade jewelry, but everyone has their own design. You would never find the same thing. There is plenty of variety for all tastes and ages. I also enjoy its bohemian environment.”

In summary, the tourists liked this place because of the selling of handicrafts and because the prices are very affordable. Another appeal was the design and the color of the wares. The variety of products and the fact they were being made in the alley by the artisans were very significant for the visitors. Another element was the high pedestrian activity of the site. All these aspects encouraged the tourists to visit *El Callejon del Diamante*.

Other group of users of alley that were interviewed was the buyers.

When they were asked how did they find out about the existence of the alley, some responded:

Participant #1: “I am from Xalapa. Since I was a kid, my parents and I used to come to the alley to eat at the *Parrillada Diamante* restaurant. After eating, I remembered my mom used to go all around the shops. So, since always I have visited this place.”

Participant #6: “I came to study almost three years ago to the UV<sup>150</sup>. My friends were the first to bring me here.”

Participant #27: “I am from Xalapa and this alley is pretty well-known in the city. Years ago, there were discos here. I came once or twice. They were too posh for me. Then, these kids started to establish here with their necklaces and stuff. I always come here to buy the ground coffee on Cali.”

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<sup>150</sup> Universidad Veracruzana. State University.

The next question was how often did they visit the alley, some answered:

- Participant #2: “Like twice per month maybe. For me it is like a stroll through the downtown.”
- Participant #11: “I like to come to Marabunta often. They always have new things. Sometimes, I come every week or every two weeks. It all depends if I have time.”
- Participant #25: “You are not going to believe me, but I come every Saturday to *Cafe Cali*. The guys working here, they all know me.”

Another question was what time did they come to visit the alley, some of their responses were:

- Participant #1: “Like at noon because in the afternoon always rains in Xalapa.”
- Participant #9: “I always come during the day because in the evening it is kind of difficult to see the products or the wares on the street stalls.”
- Participant #25: “Like at seven o’clock in the afternoon, at that hour of the day is a good time for a cup of coffee.”

Next question was what shops did they prefer to visit in the alley. Some the responses were:

- Participant #4: “*El Beduino* to eat and the t-shirts of King Monster.”
- Participant #9: “*La Sopa*, which is my favorite and the *Cafe Cali*. To shop there is Metzli and Fiora. These two always have more quality in their products and more variety in the handicrafts.”
- Participant #30: “All, but Marabunta and *Corazon Corazon* sell different things, with more design I think. They do not sell handicrafts. They have cheap clothes and cool accessories. Also here in the alley, I like to eat at *La Fonda*. They have a student menu and it is really cheap.”

The last question was would they recommend visiting this place. Some answers were:

- Participant #1: “Yes because there are more than handicrafts in here. Here you can find clothing stores and restaurants. There is variety in the environment and is fairly quiet.”
- Participant #16: “Yes. Here in the *Diamante* there is always something to see. You will never get bored. The alley has plenty of shops of different things for different people: bohemians, hipsters, alternatives, gothics, for everyone.”
- Participant #27: “Sure, is one of the best places in Xalapa. Here you can buy and eat at affordable prices.”

In summary, the buyers of *El Callejon del Diamante* visit the place quite often, an average of two visits per month regularly during day time. Their constant visits to the alley are because the place has a varied selection of shops. The regular customers visit the alley mainly for the restaurants, which are highly recommended. After eating or dining is when they go shopping. Most of the users said that the shops sell high quality products at affordable prices.

There was also the opportunity to interview the passersby who use *El Callejon del Diamante* in their daily route.

The first question was when did they start to use the alley as a daily route, some responded:

- Participant #3: “Since always, I mean since I started to work almost thirty years ago.”
- Participant #8: “Just to cross it, like a year ago because my school is two blocks from here.”
- Participant #20: “I use the alley since I was a kid. It is a shortcut from Juarez [street] to Enriquez [Avenue].”

Another question was how often did they use the alley as a shortcut. Some answers were:

Participant #3: “Every day. Four times.”

Participant #8: “Every day.”

Participant #10: “Every week maybe.”

The next question was what time of the day did they prefer to cross the alley. Their responses were:

Participant #3: “In the morning, evening or at night. It doesn’t matter, here is really safe. There are always people around. And some of the stores are open at night like the *cafes*.”

Participant #8: “I always use the alley in the morning and at three o’clock in the afternoon because is on my route to the school. At this time is always quiet. There are not many people looking at the shops or the stalls.”

Participant #10: “I used it indefinitely. In the early morning, like at eight o’clock, it is really clean. There are not street vendors yet. It looks harmonious. And in the night it is well illuminated.”

The last question of the interview was why they use this urban space in their usual route, some responded:

Participant #3: “I use it because if I do not cross the alley I would have to go all around the block. I have to take all the way Enriquez [Avenue] until Lucio [Street], and then I have to go up. The alley saves me time and effort.”

Participant #18: “My school is just two blocks around the corner on Juarez [Street]. I would have to walk much more if was not for this shortcut. Besides, there are no cars around, so it is much safer and less noisy.”

Participant #20: “I like to cross the alley because I get distracted. I used in my way to work and in my way to home. There is always something to see. It makes less monotonous my trip. In the sidewalks of other streets, because of the rush, you cannot see the display windows of the stores. On the contrary, here in

the alley the shopkeepers present their wares right in your way. Some days the guys put some music and cheer my travel.”

In summary, the pedestrians that cross regularly the alley used it as a shortcut to their destination. Even though it always has a high concentration of people. According to them, people in the alley make it a safer place. The fact that, even at night some of the shops are still open produces calm in the pedestrians. Because the alley is a pedestrian street, the passersby walk without worrying about the crosswalks, bikes or cars. They also mentioned that they prefer to use the alley in their daily route because it is a distraction. They feel the environment different, colorful and cheerful.

Part of the fieldwork for this research paper included interviews with fifteen people working in the alley. These interviews were anonymous, so in this research paper the respondents are going to be identified according to their number of participation.

The results were as follows:

- Eight were shopkeepers.
- Seven were street vendors.

The first question asked was that according to their experience, what time visitors or customers prefer to come to *El Callejon del Diamante*. Some answers were:

Vendor #1: “I would say that while there is daylight.”

Vendor #9: “The peak hours are from eleven o’clock in the morning to two o’clock in the afternoon and in the evening from five o’clock to seven o’clock.”

Vendor #13: “In the evening before six o’clock.”



The next question was what time of the day their shop or stall has more customers. Some responded:

- Vendor #3: “I think between four o’clock and six o’clock in the afternoon. At that time, the young people are out of the school. They are my main customers.”
- Vendor #7: “On weekdays at five o’clock in the afternoon maybe. It is a good hour for sales. On weekends, a lot of people come to the alley at midday.”
- Vendor #15: “In the afternoon, the people are out of work or schools. Also, we have a lot of pedestrians here at lunch and dinner time. I have to say between two o’clock and eight o’clock is when I have more customers. In the morning, I have some sales, but compare to afternoon it is clear the difference.”

Other question was where along the alley is focus the daily activity and the large number of people. Some of their responses were:

- Vendor #6: “The main concentration of people is on the entrance on Enriquez Avenue. I think because people come and go so that spot is always crowded.”
- Vendor #11: “I think at the beginning of the alley, where the mural of the alley is located. I think the concentration is because there are more street vendors and they interfere in the pedestrian flow. Also, over there are always people taking pictures or reading the legend of the alley. Maybe those are the reasons of the crowded space.”
- Vendor #15: “In the entrance, where the hotdogs are located. There is more activity there because of the restaurants and the *cafes*. For example, the coffee shop takes out its tables and the restaurants have their big signs with their menus. This reduces the pedestrian space therefore there is always crowded.”

The next question was would they consider *El Callejon del Diamante* as a landmark of the city center of Xalapa. Some answered:

- Vendor #4: “Of course, this alley is really old. Even has its own legend. It is quiet famous. Sometimes people from the TV come and interview people.”

Vendor #8: “I think it is. This alley has a lot of history. I remembered when I was a girl I used to crossed it all the time. Here has always been a commercial area. Not like it is today. Now there is too much going on in here, so overcrowded. This place is a landmark because is well-known by the *xalapeños*.”

Vendor #14: “Yes, this is the most recognized alley of the city. The other alleys are pretty, but this one is more vibrant and lively. There are always people and movement in here. In Xalapa, everyone calls it *El Callejon del Diamante*. Nobody refers to it as Jose Maria de Rivera, its official name. This place is already a tradition in the downtown.”

Other question was would they consider the alley as a touristic spot of the city center. Some responded:

Vendor #1: “Yes, in fact it appears in the touristic guides of Xalapa. The alley has regional crafts and really good food places and *cafes*. It has everything a tourist is looking in Xalapa.”

Vendor #2: “Well, it is located really close to the Cathedral. It is easy to find. Besides we have a lot of crafts and souvenirs of the city.”

Vendor #11: “Many tourists come to visit. They are always taking pictures to the shops and the stalls. The tourists appreciate a lot this place. I think is because of the colors we use in the wares. The colorful attracts them.”

The last question was what did the alley offer to be either the locals and the tourists. Some responses were:

Vendor #7: “The main attraction I think is the fact that the artisans are making their products here on the alley.”

Vendor #12: “We have shops for everyone. Not only we have places for handmade jewelry and crafts, we also have restaurants, *cafes*, clothing stores, bookstores and even a legal office.”

Vendor #15: “I think the alley is a place of tradition in Xalapa and people perceive that. The way it is now, fits perfect in the city center. It always looks folkloric and people like that. There are so many shops in here that generates curiosity to visit the alley.”

In summary, the people working in the alley mentioned *El Callejon del Diamante* is commonly visited in the afternoon, while there is still daylight. The shops and the street vendors mentioned that approximately four o'clock in the afternoon is the peak time of their sales. Some mentioned that the entrance on Enriquez Avenue is where the people and the activity are highly concentrated because this is the spot where people get in and out of the alley. Others say is because there are more street vendors in that section that cause the intense movement. All interviewees agreed that the alley is appreciated not only by locals but also by tourists. The vendors also mentioned that the restaurants and *cafes* are a popular element. They said that these are the reason why the alley is still lively even at night hours. They considered the alley as a strong landmark of the city center of Xalapa. According to their responses they are proud to work in this site.

### **Oral History of Managers or Owners of Shops in the Alley**

The people who spent most of the time in *El Callejon del Diamante* are aware of the legendary, historical and personal meanings overlying that place<sup>151</sup>. People working in the alley are the ones who clearly identify the truly sense of place of the alley.

Barbara Johnston argues: “our sense of place is rooted in our narration”<sup>152</sup>. Therefore, one can obtain valuable information about the sense of place, past events and current situations of this particular urban space through interviews of owners and managers of shops located in the alley. This information is based on experiences of people who really know the life of *El Callejon del Diamante*.

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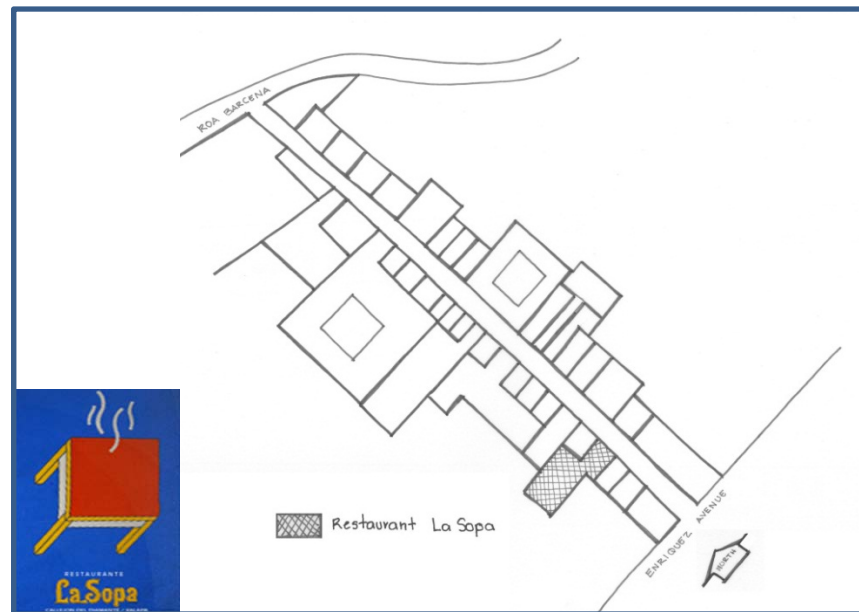
<sup>151</sup> Ryden, 43.

<sup>152</sup> Barbara Johnston, *Stories, Community, and Place: Narratives from Middle America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). 33.

Three managers of shops in the alley were interviewed for this research paper. The three stores were selected because they are very popular with visitors and regular customers of the alley. Besides, these were among the first stores to be established in the alley. Therefore, the oral history of these three sources will provide a more complete study of this pedestrian street.

In this section, the three interviewees gave their authorization to use their names in this research paper.

The first respondent was Mr. Fermin Gonzalez, manager of the restaurant *La Sopa*. The menu of this restaurant has only dishes of the state of Veracruz. Its owner is the Chef Pepe Ochoa. He is the host of the TV show called *Con Sabor Jarocho*,<sup>153</sup> daily broadcast on the state channel of RTV, Radio and Television of Veracruz.



**Fig. 4.10: Location of La Sopa restaurant in the alley.**

Mr. Fermin: “*La Sopa* established here in the alley in 1994, just after the City Council finished the renovations. This building used to be the house of a doctor I think. In those days, the Chef used to rent the house to the daughter of the doctor, but in 1998 he bought the property.”

<sup>153</sup> With flavor from Veracruz. Jarocho is another term for Veracruz or for inhabitants of Veracruz.

“The entire house was remodeled to function as a restaurant. The ground level is the restaurant while in the upper level is the residence of the Chef. His house has a separate entrance from the alley.”

“I started to work for the Chef as an accountant in 1996, and as a manager of the restaurant it was until 1999.”

“The Chef opened this place as casual eatery for the students of the area, especially for the students of the university [*Veracruzana*]. The restaurant had an affordable menu for them.”

“Maybe since 2000, it started to come more often families so the Chef decided to give the restaurant an appearance more formal.”

“The TV show of the Chef gives so much publicity to the restaurant. Sundays are always too busy for us.”

When he was asked why did Chef Ochoa decide to establish his restaurant in *El Callejon del Diamante*, he answered:

Mr. Fermin: “I think he did it because it is a centric place. There is a lot of movement here but only during the day. At night the *cafes* and the hot dog stand are the only thing open. It is really quiet at night. That is why even the Chef lives up here. Besides, initially the restaurant was meant for the students and this alley is always surrounded by them.”

“When the City Council renovated the alley, they turned into a sort of shopping arcade. This invited the people to stroll it. Nowadays, during the day until like seven o’clock in the afternoon, there is constant movement of pedestrians. That movement is good for the business, it enlivens the atmosphere.”

The next question was would you think the alley is a good advertisement for the business. He responded:

Mr. Fermin: “Yes, the alley is pretty well-known not only in the downtown but in the city. It is a place with a lot of tradition not only for the old population but for the young people as well.”

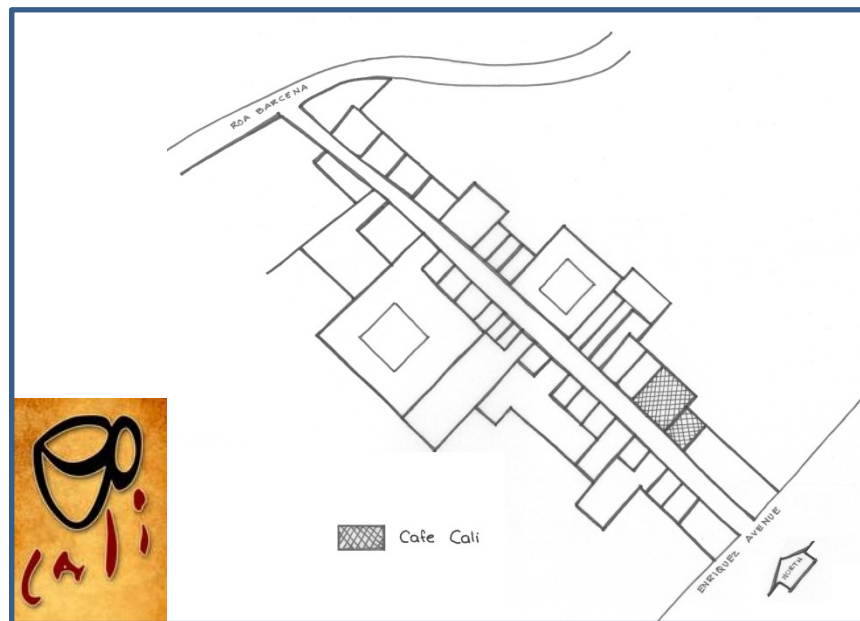
Other question was would you have any complains about the public life of the alley. His response was:

Mr. Fermin: “Maybe the street vendors invade a little bit the front façade of the restaurant. We resolve it by placing a big sign with the daily menu. Just to make sure that the passers notice us. People know where we are, but we want to get notice anyway. Every shop in the alley does that. Every shop wants to attract customers. So because we do not have any wares to expose, we place our sign.”

The last question was what is your perception of *El Callejon del Diamante* in relation with the city center. He answered:

Mr. Fermin: “The alley is a really special place in the downtown. Everyone knows it. People not only come to shop or to eat, plenty of them use the alley just to cross from Enriquez [Avenue] to Juarez [Street] and vice versa. The people that do not know the place, the tourists, when they see it, it cause them curiosity. So many stands and shops in such a reduced space. Here we are a lot of vendors. That is why the alley stands out. This place represents the life of the center of Xalapa. We are kind of disorganized and chaotic, but at the same time, we all work in peace. Everyone focus in their own business.”

Another interviewee was Jesus Ignacio Conrado, manager of the *Cafe Cali*. He is the son of the owner, Mrs. Gabriel Sastre. The *Cafe Cali* is a coffee shop and a marketer of ground coffee. The coffee that he sells is produced in the neighboring city of Coatepec, making it an enterprise 100% local and sustainable.



**Fig. 4.11: Location of Cafe Cali in the alley.**

Jesus Ignacio:

“The *Cafe Cali* has always existed in the Downtown Xalapa. In the 80’s my parents opened for the first time in front of the Cathedral. When the alley was remodeled, my parents wanted to establish the business here but they did not find an empty local. It was until 1998, when they bought the establishment to Mr. Sanchez Altamirano. Before, this was a clothing store I think. We renewed the place for the *Cafe Cali*. When we were in front of the Cathedral, the business was only marketer of ground coffee. We established for the first time the coffee shop here in the alley.”

The first question was why did they choose *El Callejon del Diamante* to establish the shop. He responded:

Jesus Ignacio: “The alley is well-known to all. When it was fixed, it looked really flamboyant. It had like a bazaar look. Many people have always come to visit it and that gives publicity to the business. The fact that here is always open with clients attracts more customers. When we start to grind the coffee, the aroma also attracts customers. That is why we do not have doors or windows, we are completely open. So people can see what we sell, what we have.”

The next question was would you have any complains about the public life of the alley. He answered:

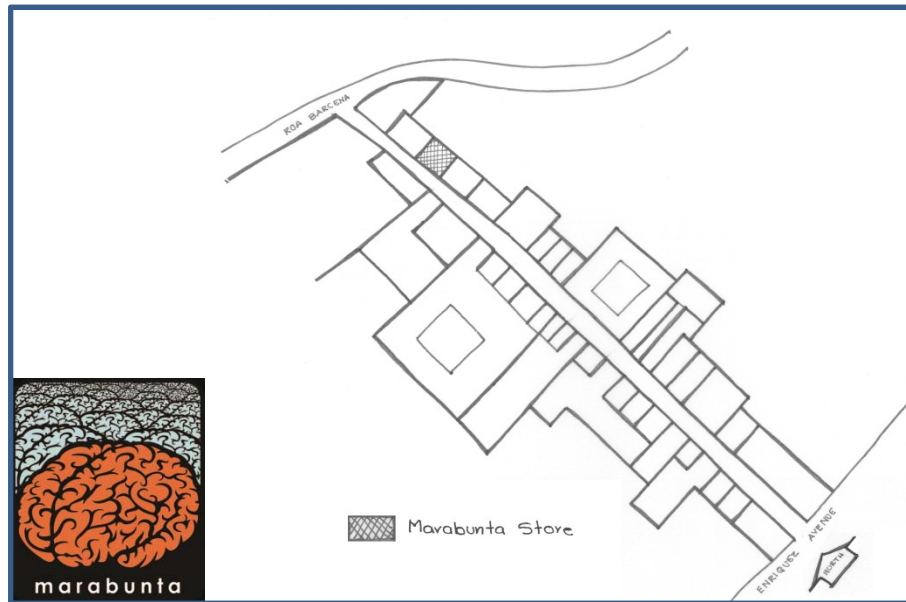
Jesus Ignacio: “Sometimes the noise maybe. The coffee shop is small so the noise outside provides a more intimate environment here on the inside. Sometimes, the guys out there put some music or the radio, then is when the ambience starts. The music cheers up the alley. I am always here and I never get bored. There is always something to do or something to see.”

Another question was how did your business contributes to the public life of the alley. His answer:

Jesus Ignacio: “A lot, for example, when we pull out our tables on the pedestrian path, is not because they do not fit inside, is because customers like to be in the movement, in the action of the alley. They enjoy it. Also, maybe we do not have music, but we provide the aroma to the environment. Each of the merchants brings something different to the alley. There are other coffee shops here, but the competition between us is loyal. Each of us has different products and different customers. The competition is good. It makes us to work harder. At the end, the only winner is the customer.”



The last interviewee was Roberta del Prado owner and manager of the store Marabunta. This store is located towards at the end of the alley. Marabunta was created by local independent designers interested in the craftsmanship.



**Fig. 4.12: Location of Marabunta store in the alley.**

Roberta:

“Before Marabunta this place was called *Creativos Nomano*. We started in *El Callejon del Diamante* in 1994. This house belonged to my aunt Mrs. Patricia Quiala, so in the beginning I rented it with other two friends. In *Creativos Nomano* we used to sell clothes with a bohemian look. Also I used to make necklaces, bracelets and earrings. Other friend made cushions and blankets with ethnic designs. We closed the store in 2000. Later from 2002 to 2006, this was the dance studio of my friend Lety Cuevas. And since 2007 has been Marabunta.”

“Marabunta took a different turn to the *Creativos Nomano*. Marabunta now offers products that seek to break with the monotony. They have a different style that prints color and a lot of fun. Marabunta now sells t-shirts, bags, purses, wallets, key chains and jewelry. All the products have cutting-edge designs, alternative with some kitsch on them.”

When asked why did you decide to establish your shop on *El Callejon del Diamante*. She responded:

Roberta: “The alley was perfect for our business. *Creativos Nomano* and Marabunta are oriented for the young population. The alley attracts a lot of young people. The *Diamante* has that essence of being an old traditional place of old Xalapa but at the same time is a lively and hip place. Here, we have place for kids, parents and even grandparents. Also the environment of the alley is really ethnic and crafty. Marabunta fits perfectly with the environment of the alley, not only with its disorder or chaos but also with its mixture of colors and textures, with its visual richness.”

Another question was what are the benefits the alley has provided to your business. She claimed:

Roberta: “The alley it is a good place for business. It is very popular because here young creators can express themselves and can show and sell their creations. The alley is visited every day by hundreds. It is visited not only by people living or working in the downtown, but by the rest of the city inhabitants and by tourists. Here we are to offer them more than crafts. We have artifacts with design, out of the ordinary and traditional.”

The last question of the interview was would you have any complains about the public life of the alley. She responded:

Roberta: “In this section of the alley, no. Over here everything is really calm. Maybe there would be complains at the entrance of the alley. There is always crowded, but not here. Here, all the shopkeepers and the street vendors work with respect. In the alley, we are a community. We all know each other. Sometimes, people ask me if there is rivalry between us, and the answer is no. Each of us has different products. Even the guys who sell their handmade jewelry, each of them use different materials and have different designs. We all are like a puzzle, but each of us is a unique piece. My shop brings to the alley a specific type of clientele. That enriches this place. That diversity is what makes this place so successful.”

In summary, the managers interviewed regard the alley as an ideal location for the development of their business because of pedestrian movement. This provides them customers at different hours of the day. This constant movement seems not to affect them. On the contrary, they mentioned that it produces a festive and cheerful ambience in the alley. They also stated that there is no real competition between shop owners because they offer different products. They expressed that there is camaraderie between the merchants of the alley. Moreover, they pointed out there is no rivalry between the established shops and the street vendors. The three participants emphasized that the mess, chaos and overpopulation of the pedestrian street are not bad factors. On the contrary, these factors are the main attraction for the customers and visitors. These factors make the alley interesting. For them, *El Callejon del Diamante* has given a marketing strategy easy and simple. Each of them expresses positive comments of this urban space and its environment. They all are satisfied with their business located in this alley in Downtown Xalapa.

## CONCLUSIONS

The function of this research paper is to make visible and to outline the qualities *El Callejon Del Diamante* has as an urban landscape and the significance on its users, inhabitants and visitors. This cultural landscape study of this peculiar alley in the city of Xalapa, Mexico, is meant to preserve valuable information especially in cases of disappearance or destruction; both of its physical structure and the places this urban space occupies in the collective memory of the city inhabitants.

Only when a place has achieved verbal expression can its permanence and meanings remain secure for the study, understanding and enjoyment for future generations. Ordinary readers can use this work to familiarize themselves with the worldview of a small Mexican colonial city. This research focuses on the commercial and social environment in one of the busiest alleys of Downtown Xalapa. This document presents how these agents influence the environment and how they organize and determine the configuration of spaces in the alley that constitute its cultural landscape.

The present culture of *El Callejon del Diamante* is the result not only of historic great roots but also of the current worldwide trend toward globalization; as evidence in the many aspects of the daily life of the alley, in the advertising media, shopping habits, in the language, and even in the architectural and urban patterns. The dramatic changes that have occurred in the alley over time have changed the atmosphere of the place several times. Twenty five years ago, before the renewal initiative, its appearance was lonely, forgotten and abandoned. This image is very different from the present which is colorful, noisy and chaotic. In spite of the changes throughout

its history; the alley has always maintained the very essence of business and community tradition among its inhabitants.

*El Callejon del Diamante* is an urban space that has identifiable spatial and visual character. It has a strong social attachment with the residents not only of the downtown but also of the entire city. The inhabitants of Xalapa recognize the place, know its history and are aware of its evolution. Therefore, the changes in the alley have been recorded in the collective memory of the city.

The most recent urban image of the alley was planned by the City Council as a tourist and commercial space to develop the economic potential of the city center. The renewal plan was based on recreating the pedestrian streets of the colonial period of Xalapa. Its goal was to create an attractive place for the locals to visit the downtown and for tourists to appreciate the craftsmanship and regional gastronomy.

However, the controlled and tidy appearance of the alley evolved resembling the appearance of the traditional *tianguis*. Much has to do with the arrival of the street vendors to the place. The competition, as the same vendors of the alley refer to it, between shopkeepers and street vendors has developed a chaotic, disordered and overcrowded environment proper of a prehispanic *tianguis*.

How the street vendors appropriated the alley and how they situated their makeshift stalls in front of the facades of the permanent shops; created between the traders a competition for attention. The presentation of the most colorful and significant wares on informal stalls or on blankets on the ground, the openness of the permanent shops to the passers and the placement of flamboyant signs are recurring techniques in the alley to attract customers. The environment

developed by this competition resembles the tradition of the *tianguis*. This indicates that although the city center and the society have been modernized; they still continue to have these indigenous colonial traditions and practices.

The present appearance of the alley is nothing more than the appropriation of the site by its users. This space is organized by its community. The shopkeepers and residents of the alley have created a different environment which has developed an acceptance by the city inhabitants. This acceptance has to do with the concept of sense of belonging that people perceive in this urban space. This sense is produced in the alley mainly by the color aspect. The positive perception of the space is influenced by color. The influence of color stems from the fact that human beings, like many other animals, share instinctive consciousness about the meaning of bright colors, which is why the attention is inevitably attracted by them. The use of color in the wares exposed in the alley becomes a powerful element. It breaks the monotony of the space and is used to attract the attention of the passers to their shops, stalls or products they want to highlight. The main visual attraction of the alley is through the color that livens up its environment.

Another aspect that develops the sense of belonging in the alley is the set of planes. This means the interposition of distracting objects between the observer and the farthest point of view. These distractions influence the perception of the space. In the alley are the advertisements and the street stalls. The variety of situations in which the set of planes is presented in the alley provides a fresh and versatile view of this place. Rather than obstructing and hindering the flow of passersby; these signs and stalls produces curiosity and invites the visitor to explore further inside.

The set of planes is also indispensable for creating the sense of enclosure that is so important to the Mexican urban identity. After several years of studying Mexican behavior, the anthropologist Henry C. Schmidt says that the Mexican society prefers to be in an environment that shuts them out from the exterior, that secludes them from the environments around. Part of his explanation indicates that this is the reason why in the Mexican colonial architecture there are plenty of narrow streets and enclosed plazas, because inside these spaces, he says Mexicans feel contained, protected and safe. Therefore, the alley provides this sense of enclosure. In it, the visitors are contained in a narrow space restricted by buildings and guarded by business and people. Its overcrowded environment isolates the visitor from the rest of the city center.

Another final aspect that develops the sense of belonging in the alley is the built environment. The architecture of the site gives rise to aesthetic meanings through its volumes, facades and planes. When the users perceive and feel that a place responds to their cultural values, that it lends a sense of security; immediately, the users begin to identify with the space and develop feelings that open processes of identification and ownership. The alley develops in the users a strong sense of belonging.

*El Callejon del Diamante* is currently a lively alley in the downtown that has been able to preserve its built cultural heritage along with the traditions and values of the population. At the same time, it has successfully transformed itself into a modern and dynamic commercial pedestrian street. This place retains a rich legacy from a past that will forever be present in the memory of the city while it bravely responds to changing conditions at the dawn of the twenty first century.

The spirit created in the alley is the spirit that people have imprinted on it. The spirit of a place is created and embodied by people. Then, the resulting enacted environment of *El Callejon del Diamante* is a fluid place. Public and private places unified by human behavior and ideas, all contribute to the lively, unique landscape of this urban space. The hardworking people of *El Callejon del Diamante* have created something many other cities desire: a vibrant street shared by locals and visitors that provides the sense of belonging to a community.



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