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REFLECTIVE PRAXIS - MAJOR ARTICLE



Urban transformations, community participation, and health: inter-sectoral and cross-country learning experience between Brazil, Chile, and Colombia

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RESUMEN

La difusión de resultados de investigación es esencial para construir entornos urbanos más saludables. Éste es un proceso complejo que requiere confianza, comprensión y motivación entre sectores y grupos de actores claves para propiciar espacios de intercambio de conocimiento y experiencias. Integrantes de la red Salud Urbana en América Latina convocaron a un grupo de investigadores, tomadores de decisiones y miembros de las comunidades de Brasil, Chile y Colombia para dialogar sobre tres intervenciones de transformación urbana. El evento “Transformaciones urbanas, participación comunitaria y salud: Aprendizajes de Brasil, Chile y Colombia” se realizó de manera virtual el 2 de septiembre de 2021; consideramos que esta experiencia brindó una oportunidad innovadora para el fortalecimiento de capacidades y la generación de nuevos vínculos entre diversos actores en América Latina. Durante el evento se reiteró la importancia de incluir a los tomadores de decisiones y a los miembros de las comunidades en el proceso de investigación para ampliar la comprensión de los contextos urbanos de todos los actores vinculados al proceso de investigación. Esperamos que esta experiencia sirva de inspiración para diálogos intersectoriales que puedan ampliar la práctica de investigación, fortalecer la difusión de resultados sobre intervenciones urbanas y sus evaluaciones para promover la salud y la sostenibilidad.

RESUMO

Traduzir e divulgar resultados de pesquisas para políticas públicas é essencial para a construção de ambientes urbanos mais saudáveis. Este é um processo complexo que requer a construção de confiança, entendimento e motivação sujeitos e atores-chave de diferentes setores, no intuito de promover espaços de troca de conhecimentos e experiências. Membros da Rede Latino-americana de Saúde Urbana (LAC Urban Health) reuniram um grupo de pesquisadores, gestores públicos e moradores representantes de comunidades locais do Brasil, Chile e Colômbia para discutir três intervenções de transformação urbana. O evento “Transformações urbanas, participação e saúde: Aprendizados do Brasil, Chile e Colômbia” foi realizado virtualmente no dia 2 de setembro de 2021; Argumentamos que essa experiência proporcionou uma oportunidade inovadora de capacitação, estabelecendo novas conexões entre diversos atores na América Latina e apoiando a tradução e divulgação de pesquisas em saúde urbana na região. A discussão destacou a importância de incluir gestores públicos e membros das comunidades nas pesquisas em saúde urbana, ampliando a compreensão sobre a complexidade dos contextos urbanos e informando melhor os processos de pesquisa. Esperamos que essa experiência inspire diálogos intersetoriais semelhantes, capazes de informar a prática e as agendas de pesquisa e apoiar a tradução e divulgação de conhecimentos em intervenções urbanas e suas avaliações, promovendo assim saúde e sustentabilidade.

ABSTRACT

Translating research results into policy and practice is essential for building healthier urban environments. This is a complex and challenging process requiring trust, understanding, and shared motivations across sectors and actor groups to establish safe spaces for experiences and ideas exchange. Recently, members of the Urban Health in Latin America Network convened a group of researchers, decision-makers, and local community members from Brazil, Chile, and Colombia to discuss three urban transformation interventions. The event ‘Urban transformations, community participation, and health: Lessons from Brazil, Chile, and Colombia’ was held virtually on September 2, 2021. We argue that this experience provided an innovative opportunity for capacity-building, establishing new connections between diverse stakeholders in Latin America, and supporting urban health research translation in the region. The discussion highlighted the importance of including

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both decision-makers and community members in urban health research, to advance decision-makers and community members' understanding of the complexity of urban contexts, and to inform the research process. We hope this experience will inspire similar cross-sectoral dialogues that can broaden research practice and agendas and support knowledge translation to inform urban interventions and their evaluations to promote health and sustainability.

Introduction

Knowledge-to-policy is a constantly growing field of research that aims to better understand how research influences policymaking and implementation processes. In the case of urban health, efforts to translate research results into actionable evidence for policy stakeholders seek to inform urban policies and interventions that improve the health of people living in cities (Haines *et al.* 2004, Pellini 2015, Tran *et al.* 2017, Rabadán-Diehl 2017, Langlois *et al.* 2019, Morais *et al.* 2021). This article reports a knowledge sharing experience between actors from multiple sectors and countries working in urban health in Latin America (Kolker 2020).

Urban transformation interventions are strategies for modifying the physical environment, aiming to improve habitability, quality of life and facilitate access to quality infrastructure and services for citizens and communities (Beardsley and Werthmann 2008, OECD 2015). These interventions may include changes to improve housing and neighborhood-built environment; access to public services and infrastructure; paving and widening streets; installation of educational, leisure and sports equipment; or changes in transport and mobility connectivity structures (Turley *et al.* 2013, Henson *et al.* 2020). The available literature points out that such interventions may positively affect the health of people living in intervened areas; however, there is still limited evidence, particularly in Latin America, concerning their health impact overall and across groups determined by age, gender, race, and ability, among others (Cerdá *et al.* 2012, Turley *et al.* 2013, Henson *et al.* 2020, Buttazzoni *et al.* 2021)

Multidisciplinary research teams from Brazil, Chile, and Colombia are evaluating the health impacts of urban interventions in informal settlements (e.g. slums, favelas, or self-built communities) or deteriorated neighborhoods in four cities as part of the SALURBAL, or Urban Health in Latin America, project (Diez Roux *et al.* 2019, Lein *et al.* 2020): Belo Horizonte in Brazil, Viña del Mar and Santiago in Chile, and Bogotá in Colombia. The results of these evaluations can inform future urban policies and interventions. To support the translation of these and other project results, SALURBAL organizes a series of dissemination and engagement activities. The '*Diálogos SALURBAL*' series, launched in 2020, seeks to engage policy makers and other local stakeholders to present and discuss

finalized, policy-relevant research on critical urban health issues in Latin America. Events take place virtually (due to pandemic-related restrictions) and are held in Spanish and Portuguese; to-date, six events have engaged over 1,700 audience members (SALURBAL | Urban Health Network for Latin America and the Caribbean 2021).

The focus of this paper is a September 2021 *Diálogos SALURBAL* event, 'Urban transformations, community participation, and health: Lessons from Brazil, Chile, and Colombia', which involved the research teams, public officials and community members representing urban intervention areas from each country (SALURBAL | Urban Health Network for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021).

This paper discusses an approach to strengthening connections between community, policy, and academic stakeholders to support urban health research translation. In the context of the enormous challenges to effective knowledge to policy translation throughout our region and elsewhere, we sought to create an unconventional space to facilitate exchange and identify strategies for future events convening community representatives, public officials, and researchers. We hope that the lessons outlined here are of use to fellow researchers as they seek to support the effective design, implementation, and evaluation of urban transformations to improve health, equity, and wellbeing, as well as to those seeking to develop innovative ways of moving ahead in knowledge to policy translation by creating unprecedented spaces of interaction between key actors and across countries in the region.

Our teams and research projects

First of all, we present our three research projects, which have been assessing structural intervention processes in Brazil (Figure 1), Chile (Figure 2) and Colombia (Figure 3). The results of the evaluations are expected to guide design and implementation of similar interventions in healthier and more sustainable ways.

BH Viva project: Belo Horizonte, Brazil

The BH Viva project seeks to evaluate the impact of the structural interventions of the Vila Viva program on the health and quality of life of people living in



Figure 1. Vila Viva Project in Aglomerado da Serra, Belo Horizonte. Source: URBEL/PBH. Available at: <http://www.Flickr.com/photos/portalpbh>. Public domain.undefined.



Figure 2. Villa under intervention by the *Programa de Regeneración de Conjuntos Habitacionales*. Source: RUCAS files.undefined.



Figure 3. TransMicable, Bogotá, Colombia. Source: TrUST files – taken by Camila Fernández (2021) undefined.

informal urban settlements (also called *villas* or *favelas*) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The study tracks health events such as asthma, homicides, adolescent pregnancy, dengue, and other contagious diseases. Researchers also evaluate health behaviors such as physical activity, diet, and mobility, while considering the impact of social and built environment characteristics. The quasi-experimental study is directed by the Observatory of Urban Health in Belo Horizonte (OSUBH), at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, and applies a multi-method approach that analyzes the

data collected by municipal agencies, conducts quantitative and qualitative interviews, and implements Systematic Social Observation (Friche *et al.* 2015).

RUCAS: Urban Regeneration, quality of life and health – Puente Alto and Viña del Mar, Chile

The Urban Regeneration, Quality of Life and Health project – RUCAS (*Regeneración Urbana, Calidad de Vida y Salud*), is evaluating the health impact of a urban regeneration program for deteriorated social housing neighborhoods or *villas* (*Programa de Regeneración de Conjuntos Habitacionales*), conducted by the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism of Chile (*Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo*, MINVU). Specifically, the study focuses on two social housing neighborhoods (*villas*) in central Chile currently undergoing interventions, one in Viña del Mar, in the Valparaíso Region, and another in Puente Alto in Santiago, the national capital. The regeneration program focuses on improving deteriorated social housing complexes (neighborhoods), emphasizing aspects related to the built environment, housing habitability, and community (strengthening of neighborhood participation and organizations). In each *villa*, the intervention is developed and implemented differently

depending on the territory and the results of local consultation processes. RUCAS is a longitudinal multimethod study that collects information on neighborhood, housing, and socioeconomic characteristics while also gathering data on the health of residents of both intervened and non-intervened communities (Baeza *et al.* 2021).

TrUST: urban transformations and health: the case of TransMiCable in Bogotá – Colombia

The ‘Urban transformations and health: the case of TransMiCable in Bogotá’ (TrUST) study is a natural experiment with a mixed-methods approach, aiming to evaluate the effect of the implementation of TransMiCable on environmental and social determinants of health, physical activity, and health indicators. TransMiCable is a cable car service launched in 2018 in Ciudad Bolívar, a peripheral area of Bogotá. The launch of TransMiCable was accompanied by major urban redevelopment interventions, including the construction of 16 urban projects such as markets, parks, community centers, and recreational and cultural facilities. The TrUST study conducted a baseline measurement before the implementation of the cable car and two follow-up measurements, which results have recently been published (Sarmiento *et al.* 2020, Guevara *et al.* 2020).

The SALURBAL project and the transformaciones urbanas (urban transformations) working group

SALURBAL is a multi-country research project launched in April 2017 (Diez Roux *et al.* 2019). The project evaluates how urban policies and urban environments impact the health of people living in Latin America. Findings from the project seek to inform policies and interventions to create healthier, more equitable, and more sustainable cities (Diez Roux *et al.* 2020). Multidisciplinary research teams from the US and seven countries across Latin America collaborate through thematic cores and working groups. The Urban Transformations working group first convened in mid-2017 and was engaged in the development of the three policy evaluation projects described here. The working group convenes researchers to discuss the interactions between urban transformations and pre-existing inequities and health disparities. Group members have worked together to publish a literature review (Henson *et al.* 2020), a policy brief (Lein *et al.* 2020), a blogpost (SALURBAL | Urban Health Network for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021), and a comparative gender analysis (under development). The group also participates in local and international events (including the 17th International Conference on Urban Health in July 2021 and the VIII Encuentro Conjunto De Investigadores in November 2021). This

group provides a space to share experiences across multiple countries and contexts to identify research needs and inform the development of dissemination and policy engagement events.

Urban transformations, community participation, and health: lessons from Brazil, Chile and Colombia

The inter-country interaction promoted by the *Transformaciones Urbanas* (Urban Transformations) working group led to the interest on comparative research in multiple levels, from methods to the way each of our groups interact and engage with local communities and decision makers. We describe below how each of our research teams built and cultivate their connections in local contexts, following up to the Dialogos SALURBAL joint event execution and lessons learned with the process.

Building relationships

Building relationships between researchers, policy-makers, public officials, community members and other potential stakeholders takes time and effort. Often there is a lack of trust between these actors and the timing of policy, execution and research do not coincide. The three teams involved in the execution of this paper have different but related reports of community and policy engagement, which are described below.

Brazil

Vila Viva urban interventions were informed by participatory urban planning processes and mapping of areas of social interest by the *Companhia Urbanizadora de Belo Horizonte* (URBEL). The research team from OSUBH joined the Belo Horizonte health and urban planning sectors early on to develop a project to assess the implementation of these interventions and their potential health impacts. Over many years, this relationship has been cultivated through meetings and exchanges of data and research results between public officials and the OSUBH research team. Evaluations have considered at least 10 years now, allowing observation of longer-term impacts of the interventions. Local awareness campaigns were implemented during each round of data collection and fieldwork, with meetings and logistic arrangements with schools, civil society associations, and health centers. Although changes in government and the allocation of resources over time have partially delayed the implementation of the interventions, the study has been resilient and adaptative, and close connections to public officials has facilitated primary data collection processes.

Chile

RUCAS follows two *villas* while they are undergoing urban regeneration interventions implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU). MINVU has implementation teams of professionals dedicated to work with the community in the intervention *villas*, with which the RUCAS team keeps close contact. This connection with the implementation teams makes it possible to closely follow the progress of the intervention, maintain dialogue, and provide feedback. On the other hand, since the conception of the study to date, with the qualitative component of the study, the ongoing follow-up activities with study participants, regular contact with community leaders, and visits to the villas have served to build trust, allowed incorporating the local knowledge in the development of study instruments and study aims, and to take into account the perceptions and experience of community members and leaders in the interpretation of study findings. Further, these strong connections and the commitment established between the research team, implementation teams and community representatives has facilitated the dissemination and discussion of study results, and the communication of the role of urban regeneration in determining health and wellbeing.

Colombia

The TrUST study implemented a group-model building workshop to co-create the natural experiment framework with 31 stakeholders representing academia, government, and civil society. The study capitalized on existing networks and connections between decision-makers, public institutions, and Universidad de Los Andes. Exploratory site visits prior to data collection allowed the research team to identify and involve community representatives in the study. Meetings and the presentation of preliminary results have strengthened these bonds. Likewise, participatory qualitative methods such as Our Voice (King *et al.* 2016) and Ripple Effects Mapping (Chazdon *et al.* 2016) and

have deepened the collaboration, and the study's principal investigator's presence and participation in fieldwork further reinforced these bonds. The engagement of decision-makers and community members has been key to results dissemination. The TrUST study results (policy brief and presentations) are now used as evidence for cable cars planning in Bogotá.

A joint effort for an unprecedented event

The event 'Diálogos SALURBAL – Urban transformations, community participation, and health: Lessons from Brazil, Chile, and Colombia' was held on September 2, 2021, via Zoom webinar platform and lasted two and a half hours (Figure 4).

The whole organization process was collaborative and promoted inter-country and inter-sectorial exchange of experiences. We detail on Tables 1 and 2 the planning, participants, and day-of logistics for the event, which allows the reader to visualize the complexity of the arrangements and the richness of the experience.

In total, 248 people, from 13 countries, registered for the event, 49% representing the academic sector and 24% the public sector, with 153 attendees (or 63%) of registrants attending the event live. The highest attendance was observed from Colombia, followed by Brazil and then Chile.

Lessons learned

Panel 1. Academia: "Evaluaciones de transformaciones urbanas y salud" (Assessments of urban transformations and health)

During this panel, each of our research teams presented the interventions that motivated our studies and the event, including information about local context, evaluation methods, and preliminary results. Each presentation was delivered by team members directly engaged in the event's organization.



Figure 4. Event dissemination material. Source: own elaboration.xlink1.

Table 1. Description of event planning and organization.

Event	Diálogos SALURBAL – Urban transformations, community participation, and health: Lessons from Brazil, Chile, and Colombia
Agenda	Welcome roundtable, followed by four discussion panels (research teams, community members, decision-makers, and a general panel), and closing remarks. Each discussion panel included at least one representative of each country
Aim	To facilitate an exchange of experiences, and to contribute to capacity building within and between a multidisciplinary team of researchers, decision-makers, and community members from the three mentioned countries
Participants on screen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two moderators • Four community representatives • Three researchers • Three public officials • Three time zones
Logistical challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-way simultaneous Spanish/Portuguese translation required • Varying familiarity with online platforms and virtual events among panelists; Target audiences from at least three countries, multiple disciplinary backgrounds, and diverse sectors (including community members)
Actions taken to address these challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one researcher from each country participated in event coordination, and a technical support team was engaged throughout the planning process • Two pre-event meetings were held: one for community members and another with all the panelists, research teams, and moderators. (Meeting aims: allow participants and moderators to get to know each other in a more informal space, encourage community representatives to feel more comfortable with other stakeholders and academic actors, test webinar platform functions and simultaneous translation features, timing, and other logistical details.) • Each panel was organized to allow community representatives to speak first, before public officials. This structure sought to ensure that community representatives felt free to present their perspectives and agendas and, without the sense of restraint or intimidation that may result from a primarily technical or political discourse. • Dissemination strategies were developed based on country team networks of partners and related stakeholders, in particular government institutions, universities, and research groups (institutional e-mails and social media were employed, and the centralized SALURBAL communications team disseminated the event to a broader global audience)

Table 2. Detail of event participants.

Panel	Description	Panelists
Introduction	Welcome and presentation <i>Diálogos SALURBAL</i>	Moderator and Director of the Instituto de Desarrollo Urbano de Bogotá
Panel 1 Academia: Urban Transformation and Health Evaluations	Presentation on the urban interventions and SALURBAL evaluations	Panelist 1 [Brazil]: BH Viva project researcher Panelist 2 [Chile]: RUCAS coordinator Panelist 3 [Colombia]: TrUST coordinator
Panel 2 Community members: Inhabiting Urban Transformations	Community members' reflection on their interaction with the process and actors who participated in the intervention.	Panelist 1 [Brazil]: community member representing the <i>Cafezal</i> in the <i>Aglomerado da Serra</i> . Panelist 2 [Chile]: Leader and President of the Neighborhood Council of Villa Marta Brunet. Panelist 3 [Colombia]: Leader of the San José Sur Oriental neighborhood in the district of San Cristóbal in Bogotá. Panelist 4 [Colombia]: President of the community action board of the Manitas neighborhood in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogota.
Panel 3 Public officials: Implementation of Urban Interventions	Interventions from public officials on the effects of urban interventions, the evaluation process, and the main lessons learned.	Panelist 1 [Brazil]: Director-President of URBEL – Companhia Urbanizadora de Belo Horizonte. Panelist 2 [Chile]: Head of the implementation of the Housing Regeneration Program from the Metropolitan Housing and Urbanism Service. Panelist 3 [Colombia]: Head of the Citizen Attention Office at the Urban Development Institute (IDU).
General panel and audience questions	Dialogue between county panelists	All panelists from the community panel and the decision-makers panel
Closing	Brief reflection from each study's principal investigator.	Panelist 1 [Brazil]: Principal investigator, SALURBAL Brazil and the BH-Viva Project. Panelist 2 [Chile]: Principal investigator, SALURBAL Chile and the RUCAS Study (Urban regeneration, quality of life and health). Panelist 3 [Colombia]: Principal investigator, SALURBAL Colombia and the TrUST project.

Presentations were strictly limited to four minutes each. This strategy sought to safeguard the time for the discussion among representatives of the three sectors.

The three projects represent natural experiments applying multi-method approaches to observe results related to diverse topics such as violence, social

relations, physical activity, residential satisfaction, and mental health, among others. Researchers identified common lessons across the three studies: 1) the relevance of generating evidence-based results to effectively inform and orient decision-makers; 2) the importance that evaluations be flexible to enable them to address the differing timelines of public policy and

program implementation, and local specificities; 3) the importance of qualitative methods that improve research sensitivity and understanding of impact; and 4) the importance of promoting and sustaining relationships with local residents, leaders, and local forums and associations in order to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of the research processes. These lessons align with previous participatory experiences from our three local studies and also from SALURBAL intercountry experiences (Langellier *et al.* 2019, Guevara *et al.* 2020, Morais *et al.* 2021, Baeza *et al.* 2021, López-Contreras *et al.* 2021).

Panel 2. Community: "Habitar las transformaciones urbanas" (Inhabiting urban transformations)

The community panel represented the most innovative aspect of the *Diálogos* event. Taking place following the research teams' presentations and before the public officials' interventions, this panel sought to provide a safe space for community representatives to speak openly among themselves and to invite comments and questions from the audience. The panel was composed of one community representative from Brazil, one from Chile, and two from Colombia.

Experiences of the three countries coincided in that each of these urban transformations was made possible by the joint effort to formulate public policies with local community members, leaders, and public officials. According to participants, these interventions often take place in a context of generalized mistrust by citizens towards state initiatives. For example, in Chile, unfulfilled promises in the past had created a lack of credibility and mistrust of public housing interventions. Panelists agreed that engaging communities is a challenging yet fundamental part of the urban transformation process. Having diverse population groups such as children, women, people with disabilities, environmental advocacy groups, among others, may enable more comprehensive and inclusive interventions.

Community representatives also expressed that these engagement processes achieved things they never imagined possible. In the Colombian case, community engagement played a fundamental role in prioritizing the most needed infrastructure: a civil registry office, parks, and community centers – although navigating this process and multiple interests implied a heavy workload for community representatives. Urban transformations provided changes that went beyond built environment regeneration. Community members reported perceiving a better quality of life, increased use of public space use, and strengthened community bonds.

We fought a lot because public officials should listen to the community first. It is very difficult for decision-makers to understand the real needs if they do not

know the territories. After all, we are the ones who live here and experience the struggles and needs. (Community representative)

Community representatives' participation in public intervention processes and evaluations has also revealed related and relevant issues in these communities. In Brazil, places that fell within an intervention area but were neglected following implementation became epicenters of drug trafficking; in Chile, concerns about domestic violence, school dropouts, and the quality of life of people with disabilities have emerged; and, in Colombia, indemnities are a contentious issue for residents who used to live in the works area.

Panel 3. Public officials: "Implementación de intervenciones urbanas" (implementation of urban interventions)

During the public officials' session, each panelist had eight minutes to address questions sent to them in advance by event organizers. Main topics encompassed the institutional process for the urban intervention implementation, cross-sectoral participation, and lessons learned.

All panelists were engaged in the design and implementation of urban interventions in their countries. All agreed on the relevance of health concerns for urban interventions, highlighting mental health and physical wellbeing among the most perceptible improvements following these interventions. Panelists emphasized the importance of contextualized academic evaluations and the need for institutional collaboration. All three also reinforced the importance and decisiveness of including local communities' perspectives to determine needs and expectations. In this sense, panelists called for a paradigm shift in public policy to incorporate community members' voices, aiming to implement more comprehensive and sustained policies and interventions. Related to this, a panelist said:

We thought we were going to change the citizens, but they ended up changing us with a new way of managing projects. We want to continue working hand-in hand with the citizens of the city of Bogota. (Public official)

Roundtable and audience questions

After a short break, during which the research team showed a short video on the three interventions, all participants returned for a roundtable discussion. For each round of questions, community representatives responded first, before public officials, in order to motivate confidence and highlight the importance of these local perspectives. Questions focused on what is or should be the role of academia, communities, and public officials in the development, implementation, and evaluation of urban interventions.

The Brazilian community representative highlighted the importance of research institutions as a safe, intermediate place that can bridge the gap between public management and the community. Research teams should promote intersectoral dialogue, qualifying and promoting equity in decision-making spaces. The public official from Brazil reinforced the idea that local institutions should hold participatory forums where both community and academic representatives are welcome, while recognizing that this participation may not always be effective or sufficient. This official claimed that these forums are also spaces of learning for both public officials and communities and that the institution has been trying to improve them, despite limitations and challenges imposed by political and budgetary constraints.

The community representative from Chile pointed to the neighborhood council (a technical committee composed of community representatives, members of the urban transformation implementation team, and authorities that meets monthly), as a place for learning and working for the common good. It was also emphasized the need for public management to become acquainted with local territories and promote transdisciplinary ministerial action to allow better quality and more sustainable interventions. The Chilean public official reinforced the need for collaboration between different ministries, adding that this should span the local to higher administrative levels, taking into account the university evaluation team's reflexive and critical approach to the intervention process and also their contributions toward building trust between governments and community.

Colombia's community representatives talked about the importance of efficient and direct communication with the community, both on behalf of public officials and the university research teams. Urban transformation interventions should integrate about local traditional knowledge, which can support the sustainability of interventions over time. Political sustainability was also a special concern since changing government administrations often affect the continuity of projects. The Colombian public official reinforced the argument that neither public management, nor communities, nor academia, could accomplish their roles on their own; each sector has a role, and building networks across sectors and contexts while prioritizing collective interests over personal ones is essential.

The second question for the full group was 'What suggestion would you give to public officials and public officials/community representatives (as appropriate) to improve urban intervention processes?' Each participant was allowed one minute to respond. Given time constraints, only local community representatives participated in this round.

The Brazilian representative advised seizing the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences, and to participate and incorporate new technological devices whenever possible to facilitate participation. From Chile, the advice was to clarify goals; to build trust and accountability among neighbors, especially for those who claim to be local leaders, who should put common interests before their own; and to be vigilant towards public management, knowing it has not always done what is best for the community. Finally, the Colombian community members emphasized the importance of local presence by public officials, of listening to people's needs, and of aiming for social development in a continuous manner, not only during the intervention's implementation. These representatives also recognized the role of communities in providing critical assessments of public works, and the importance of leadership skills to communicate and disseminate information across their communities.

Closing

Final remarks brought together the principal investigators of each project, making brief reflections on the relationship between implementing, inhabiting, and evaluating urban transformations in Latin America. The three researchers agreed regarding the relevance of creating connections among the different sectors and actors involved in urban transformations in Latin America, acknowledging that the experience exchange could help improve each sector's work. For academia, working together with the community, public officials, and stakeholders is what makes evaluations possible and worthwhile. Moreover, it allows researchers to understand the complexity of the context, the interventions, and their effects.

Post event

This section outlines core lessons for each sector involved in the *Diálogos* event.

- **Common lessons**

The effects of urban transformation interventions develop over time and interact with the diversity of the local population and existing social inequalities. This event highlighted the importance of territorially contextualized policy, interventions, and research, to encompass the complexity of urban environments and the diversity and specifics of local inhabitants' daily lives.

Public policy processes and interventions have their own rhythm, which responds to budgetary and political conditions. Resulting modifications and delays can affect the way interventions are implemented, how people perceive these actions, and the conditions for their evaluation. To this context, we must add the impact of unexpected factors that may interfere with the implementation and assessment of local

interventions, for example, public policy budgeting, change of governments, *in loco* conflicts that may interrupt and/or modify implementation, impacting directly how research teams can lead assessment studies; as well as unpredictable events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Public officials and research teams must be resilient, flexible, and creative, allowing adaptation to the urban transformation processes.

Both positive and negative aspects were reported during this event, indicating that local community members' feedback can help inform a critical and equitable implementation and evaluation of urban transformation interventions. This experience highlighted the importance of sustained intersectoral collaboration, to develop and maintain trust, and to ensure sensitivity to local populations and their needs throughout planning, implementation, and evaluation phases.

- **Specific learning by sector**

Research:

The experience of organizing this *Diálogos SALURBAL* event reaffirmed our belief in the need for academic research in urban health to generate spaces for connection both to public officials and public officials, and with local community members in the territories undergoing transformative structural interventions. These initiatives are still uncommon and may lack the ability to effectively communicate results from a rigorous evaluation.

This experience demonstrated the relevance of creating space for research to receive open critique and feedback from community members and stakeholders, and further motivated our three research teams to incorporate more sensitive approaches toward this end.

This event also provides evidence of the value of comparative research across geographic contexts. Although timing, local contexts, and data may differ greatly among countries and local urban contexts, cross-national conversations like this one can inform the development of future investigations.

Community:

Participants valued the opportunity to hear from people living in other areas undergoing urban transformation interventions. The event was hailed as an opportunity to promote confidence and validate the experiences of people who often feel left out of the decision-making processes, contributing to building strength and encouraging community organization and networking.

Public management:

The most important lesson emerging from this event for public officials stems from the exchange of experiences between different urban contexts in different countries, learning from other contexts'

strategies developed to deal with political and budgetary concerns, for example. While these contexts may seem distant or disconnected in culture, in reality they face similar challenges, for which solutions may be worth sharing and replicating.

Final remarks

The *Diálogos SALURBAL* event, 'Urban transformations, community participation, and health: Lessons from Brazil, Chile, and Colombia' represented an opportunity to build capacity and understanding of complex urban environments, and to strengthen relationships across different countries, research teams, sectors, and local contexts. The event successfully convened local community representatives, public officials, and researchers to discuss a complex topic. Their discussions and interactions were considered enriching by all participants as well as by the event's audience, as reflected by comments exchanged during the event. A fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences included agreement as well as respectful dissent, demonstrating that participants felt comfortable enough to express their opinions and concerns, regardless of their different countries and personal experiences with the transformation interventions.

As a whole, this experience underscores the relevance of including both public officials and community stakeholders in dialogue surrounding health-oriented policy evaluations to improve research practices and support the dissemination and translation of research results. It is worth reiterating the importance of pre-event meetings for ensuring that community representatives felt at ease with the format and technology, and engaging with public officials and researchers. We intentionally structured the event to allow community stakeholders to speak before public officials, signaling the prioritization of community-based experiences and perspectives.

Given time constraints, including time lost due to issues with the simultaneous translation service, we ended the event with researcher's comments but without a final round of other participants' remarks. Future events should build-in ways to ensure time for this final round of comments, and might consider including a discussion of ways for participants to stay connected and follow up on the ideas and proposals discussed.

Six central lessons emerge from the process of planning and implementing the September 2021 dialogue. First, researchers must build capacity to evaluate the territory-specific effects of urban interventions, and how these interventions interact with local contexts, communities, and existing social inequalities. Second, research design must adapt to social processes and the rhythms of public policy. Third, actively involving community actors and decision-makers in the research process helps to establish trust and improves capacity for research dissemination and uptake. Fourth, understanding the

motivations and objectives of diverse stakeholders is fundamental for translating research into products that are accessible to communities and decision-makers. Fifth, as researchers, we must value listening and learning from the experience of community representatives. Finally, creating space for dialogue among actors representing national and local contexts across Latin America provides unique learning opportunities.

This event aligns with the SALURBAL Project's stated vision of engaging public officials and the public in a new dialogue about urban health and sustainability, and establishing a network to support continued learning and translation of evidence. Ensuring the continuity of connections across geographic contexts and sectors is difficult, but remains an essential component of achieving effective research translation. Limited human and financial resources, changing political contexts, and misalignment between research and policy priorities and timelines can present barriers to establishing and maintaining effective dialogue. Nevertheless, our experience illustrates how existing connections, capacities, and commitments can be leveraged to advance research translation and position urban health at the forefront of planning and policy discussions, even during challenging times. The benefits of such activities may be observable in time, as other similar opportunities of comparability and cross-learning interaction are created, looking into capturing both the stability and changes of the results over-time, and stimulating different actors to reach solutions that represent their views together with lessons learned with other countries in the region.

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Notes on contributors

All authors are members of the Urban Transformations Working Group, which convenes diverse researchers from the Urban Health in Latin America project (SALURBAL) to discuss the interactions between urban transformations and pre-existing inequities and health disparities in Latin America.

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Ethics statement

The SALURBAL study protocol was approved by the Drexel University Institutional Review Board with ID # 1612005035.

In Brazil, SALURBAL was approved by the Federal University of Minas Gerais IRB (CAAE 70209917.00000.5149). The BH Viva evaluation project was approved by the UFMG Research Ethical Committee and by the Belo Horizonte City Health Department (CAAE: 11548913.30000.5149).

All phases of the TrUST study were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of the Universidad de los Andes (Acta No. 806-2017; Acta No. 977-2019; Acta No. 994-2019).

RUCAS project is approved and annually renewed by the Ethical Council of the Faculty of Medicine of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (ID 170727004).

The use of participants' images and event content was signed before the event granted by UniAndes technical support team.

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