

As we emerge from a tragic pandemic, let's catalyze action among professionals in the fields that shape the physical housing and communities where we live. This series of case studies shares innovations that are advancing a set of **guiding principles** for built environment professionals—from creative ways to redress inequities and engage the public in participatory planning, to unique housing and community models that enable every resident to thrive.



Quiero Mi Barrio – I Love My Neighborhood Urban Regeneration Program

Ministry of Housing and Urbanism, Chile

By Stephanie Firestone and Katherine Wyndham

The Chilean government is tackling inequities and blight one neighborhood at a time through its Quiero Mi Barrio program. Translated as “I love my neighborhood,” this urban regeneration program is a collaborative model between the government and its citizens. Launched in 2006, the program improves both the physical infrastructure and the social fabric in impoverished neighborhoods using public dollars and a variety of local, regional, and national resources. It centers neighborhood residents in the process, providing them with the tools and the power to reimagine and codesign the neighborhood spaces where they live and meet the needs of residents of all ages. It aims to achieve greater social and neighborhood integration, with recovered public spaces, better environmental conditions, and strengthened social relationships.

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Needs/Challenges

The accelerated growth of Chilean cities that started in the 1950s generated socio-spatial segregation and urban deterioration—particularly in neighborhoods where the government provided low-income housing and in older neighborhoods. These often lacked green areas, recreational facilities, and other public amenities, and they were located far from the city and without reliable transportation. They were often in areas prone to flooding and more susceptible to environmental contamination. Further complicating the situation, many of the neighborhoods had low levels of social organization to engage residents and high levels of crime. Negative stereotypes became rampant and led to the social exclusion of residents within the struggling neighborhoods and weakened ties within society. Chile’s Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU) realized, despite dedicating 80 percent of its budget to providing a sufficient housing supply for its citizens, that simply delivering housing was insufficient.

Innovations

The Quiero Mi Barrio program was established to reverse this downward spiral. The intervention model prioritizes citizen participation and cross-sector work. The program seeks to shift behavior, mobilize local actors, and generate effective spaces for dialogue and agreements around joint projects, with the intention of elevating community members from passive neighborhood residents into neighbors with both duties and rights living in quality neighborhoods.

The Framework

Quiero Mi Barrio gives equal priority to the physical and social infrastructures in these neighborhoods by co-designing a coordinated plan for these two aspects of the neighborhood.

The physical and spatial Works Management Plan or **Plan de Gestión de Obras** (PGO Matrix) includes:

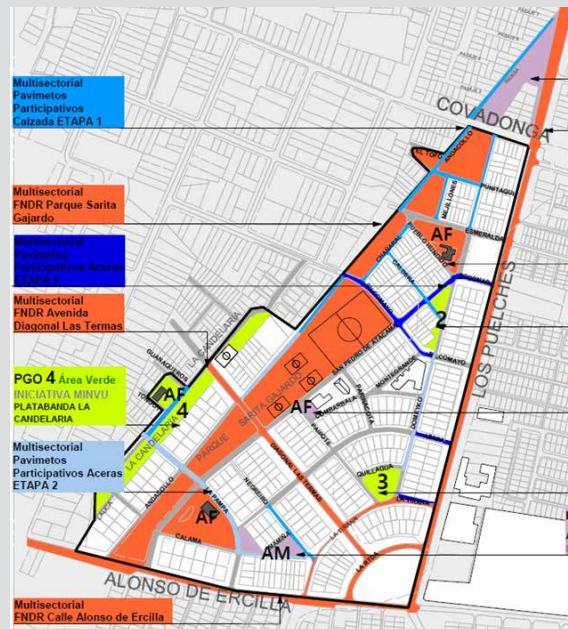
- **Green areas** - squares, trees, playgrounds, pergolas/shading areas, gardens, gymnastics circuits, bike paths, sandpits, bleachers, picnic areas, restrooms, and athletic courts;
- **Built infrastructure** - multipurpose rooms, sports centers, community centers;
- **Circulation** - paving and sidewalks, local and intermediate roads, passages, parking areas, and pedestrian circulation; and
- **Complementary works** - urban furniture such as benches, retaining walls, rainwater evacuation, land clearance (drainage, fillings, compaction, etc.), potable water networks, sewage, electricity, gas, irrigation works, lighting, tree cover, and acquisition of real estate for collective uses.

The Social Management Plan or **Plan de Gestión Social** (PGS Matrix) is linked directly to the PGO Matrix. The PGS is designed to improve social integration, strengthen social and neighborhood networks, and emphasize neighbors’ participation in improving the conditions of their living environment. Social initiatives include:

- Training for neighborhood leaders;
- Educating neighbors in areas related to the improvement and use of public spaces;
- Cleaning and beautification of the environment;
- Strengthening neighborhood organizations;
- Improving communications;
- Monitoring and evaluating programs; and

- Strengthening the community’s capacity to maintain and carry out future endeavors, such as teaching residents to apply for other funds to carry out projects.

The program is also centered around five cross-cutting objectives that are a required part of the physical and social work plans and essential to the revitalization process for each neighborhood. These are: citizen participation; heritage, culture, and identity; management of the local environment; citizen security; and digital connectivity.



- Quiero Mi Barrio projects
- Major infrastructure programs financed by the National Regional Fund such as Sarita Gajardo Park and main avenue improvements
- Participatory paving program developed by the municipality and financed by MINVU

Neighborhood Selection and Project Methodology

Every year, 50 low-resourced neighborhoods are selected to participate through a competition process. The neighborhoods are chosen (760 to date) by a regional jury that includes the local mayor and governor, as well as members of the regional government and its ministries. Their involvement from the outset creates accountability to address the problems that emerge through the master planning process.

Once neighborhoods are selected, the MINVU transfers resources to the relevant municipalities. An office is opened in each neighborhood, including two professionals—one from the urban infrastructure realm and one in the social sphere—who support all activities during the three to five years that they work in the neighborhood. Each neighborhood is awarded a budget of 800 million pesos (nearly one million U.S. dollars), of which almost half is dedicated to the social plan. Additionally, the municipality must invest approximately \$175 per household in the neighborhood, and residents must contribute around \$18 per person or work an equivalent number of volunteer hours.

The first phase, which lasts approximately eight months, begins with a needs assessment. A group of 45 indicators—the Index of Urban and Social Deterioration—informs the definition of the baseline or current state of the neighborhood. A survey of neighborhood residents, which typically attains a 60 percent response rate, ascertains residents’ perceptions and preferences, alongside a professional analysis of the neighborhood’s challenges. These data inform the

neighborhood’s master plan, which is co-developed by a technical team—including local and regional experts from academia or foundations—and representatives from the neighborhood and community organizations. Analyzing all this data together helps identify problems requiring structural solutions and indicates which government sectors must be convened, generating a comprehensive portfolio of both physical infrastructure and social projects.

The second phase is implementation, and the third phase is evaluation (including a repeat of the population survey in phase one). At the end of the project, a report detailing the completed work, including the ongoing activities required of both the residents and the municipality to achieve the neighborhood’s 10-20 year vision, is produced.



Governance Model and Multisectoral Collaboration

Quiero Mi Barrio uses collaboration across departments and levels of government and with civil society as a strategy to pull together resources, provide sustainability, and address issues that affect the neighborhood but go beyond the competencies of the MINVU. This governance model includes three main actors: the municipality, the regional office of MINVU or Regional Ministerial Secretary for Housing and Urbanism (SEREMI of MINVU), and a Neighborhood Development Council (NDC).

When Quiero Mi Barrio staff arrive in the neighborhood, they ensure that all departments of the local government and all the secretaries of the SEREMI know about the program. Regional and municipal resources and programs that could be leveraged at the neighborhood level are identified and included within the Master Plan, complementing the PGO and PGS. The convening capacity of the program is reinforced by the availability of its own financing, independent of other programmatic lines of participating institutions.

The municipality is central to the sustainability of the neighborhood recovery and the management of participation by other sectors. It is the municipality that, together with the residents, will continue to be directly linked to the neighborhood; therefore, it is critical to determine and clearly articulate municipal roles. Municipalities are the primary local development agents and are typically responsible for building trust and liaising with neighborhood residents, managing the execution of interventions, and allocating resources for infrastructure work.



The Neighborhood Development Council (NDC) is the most critical part of this governance model. The NDC is formed in the first phase and is made up of representatives from existing formal and informal organizations within the neighborhood as well as neighborhood leaders. It is charged with representing the community in co-designing the project and encouraging community engagement. Because each neighborhood is unique, with its own local NDC, the program is an urban laboratory where various interventions are field-tested, residents provide immediate feedback, and local and regional governments respond with incremental improvements.

The NDC represents a new form of citizen participation in Chile—one where citizens take responsibility for their environment, nurture their capacity to work with state agencies, and propose changes with clarity and passion.

It also reflects a new type of neighborhood contract between the people and the state, structuring the rights and duties of each party and, importantly, extending beyond the political tenures of the local, regional, and national governments.

More importantly, the NDC is recognized by the neighbors as a participatory space that strengthens the social fabric of the neighborhood and generates interest by neighbors to participate in decision-making processes. As Edith Pereira, President of the NDC “El Olivar,” La Serena said: “We were lucky enough to have really committed professionals. They’ll visit house by house if necessary. We would call ourselves lucky if we had 12 people at our Resident Union meetings, but we get at least 80 attendants for [Quiero] program meetings. The problem is nobody cared about us in the past. Authorities only came here when canvassing. This program has engaged us in permanent activity.”

Intergenerational Focus

The primary beneficiaries of these improvements are the children and older people who spend most of their time in the neighborhoods. An intergenerational approach is also seen as important to help stave off the migration of young people away from the neighborhoods. Since the legacy and traditions of the neighborhood are relevant for older and younger residents, the project tries to reconstruct and preserve this history by identifying places, events, people, and commemorative or ritual dates important to long-time residents. Each neighborhood produces a “neighborhood book” that includes older people’s stories and traditions and strengthens the neighborhood’s identity.

Sarita Gajardo

Sarita Gajardo joined the program in 2018. In this rapidly aging urban barrio, 58 percent of the neighborhood’s population is already 65 or older. Many are women living alone, and there are very few children. The first project completed in Sarita Gajardo was the installation of LED lights throughout the neighborhood to increase the older adults’ sense of security.

Many Sarita Gajardo residents are grandparents with childcare responsibilities who prioritized having intergenerational community spaces where they have a sense of ownership. The **Plaza de la relajación y la armonía** (“square for relaxation and harmony”) revitalized a blighted area of the neighborhood, creating a neighborhood square for informal gatherings, activities, and celebrations. Outdoor furniture enables older adults to be seated comfortably, with a backrest and elbow pads, alongside a safe play area for their grandchildren. An older persons’ day center with a special playground for children is under construction, and the Quiero team is coordinating with the municipality’s Office of the Elderly and the regional office of the National Service of the Elderly, SENAMA, to organize programs and activities.



Collaboration with various government departments is a key feature of the program. In partnership with the municipality’s environmental department, most older people now have vermicomposters to compost organic matter using various species of worms. The primary healthcare unit, CESFAM (Centro de Salud Familiar, or Family Health Center), held a workshop on foot care, which is a service usually limited to older people with diabetes and foot injuries. Older residents prioritized improving hazardous sidewalks, so the program coordinated with the municipality to apply for funds through a Participatory Paving Program of SEREMI MINVU to cover costs beyond the program’s budget. If the municipality receives and utilizes these funds during the implementation of the Quiero Mi Barrio program, the neighbors are exempt from the copayment required by the MINVU.

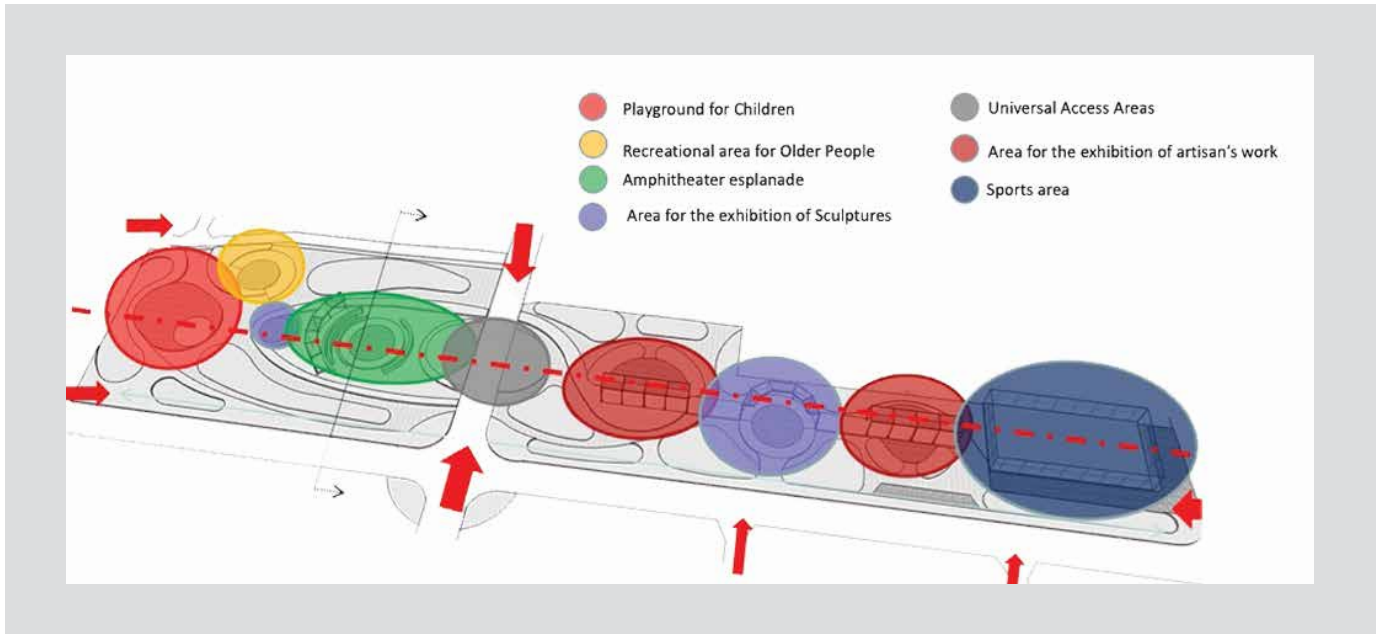
The PGS also responded to emerging needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, including concerns about memory issues and isolation. The Quiero team collaborated with the University of Biobío’s School of Phono-audiology to evaluate older people’s memory functions and make referrals for healthcare support. Isolation during the pandemic prompted a request for workshops to learn how to use smartphones, and now all older adults have a WhatsApp to connect them with the Quiero Mi Barrio professional team and the NDC.



Poet’s Park in Chimbarongo

The neighborhood of Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, also known as the ‘Neighborhood of the Poets,’ is considered a national enclave of cultural heritage, reflecting the historical artisan tradition of wickerwork. When the neighborhood joined Quiero Mi Barrio in 2016, a key objective was to re-value wicker crafts and encourage the transmission of this trade to new generations. Through the reconditioning and recovery of public spaces, the program provided the infrastructure to exhibit and market wicker products, positioning this trade as a cultural and territorial heritage. As part of the program’s PGO and PGS, Quiero recovered an 8,000 square meter abandoned and vandalized area of the neighborhood that residents had prioritized because it was a site for drug addiction, garbage, and rubble dumps. With a budget of CLP 350,000 (\$430,000 U.S. dollars), the space was transformed into a safe intergenerational tourist park called ‘Parque de Los Poetas’ (The Poet’s Park), replete with redesigned circulation paths, a playground for children, a recreational area for older people, an amphitheater esplanade, an area for the exhibition of sculptures, two areas for the exhibition of artisans’ crafts, and a sports area.





Successes to Date

Installing an office in the neighborhood with professionals in the physical and social realms is a key factor in Quiero Mi Barrio’s success. The on-the-ground and constant community presence makes the program visible and provides a channel for building trust and collaboration with the local government’s technical teams. It has also proven to be an effective vehicle for communication, since residents can easily access and raise issues with program professionals at any time.

In 2020, MINVU undertook its first post-five-year external assessment of progress in each Quiero Mi Barrio neighborhood. Based on surveys in 14 neighborhoods at three time periods—during program phases one and three, and then five years later—resident perceptions of quality of life increased by 12.5 percent at the end of the program and by seven percent after five years. The surveys also revealed important lessons that are informing the program’s evolution. Among the biggest take-aways is that inequities differ among neighborhoods and require differing levels of support. Consequently, the ministry defined a new classification criterion that distinguishes neighborhoods of medium and high complexity, which in turn are subdivided into categories according to an urban multi-dimensional index recently developed. While the physical problems can be resolved with money, the program also illustrated how in some neighborhoods resolving problems is a complex social process that requires significantly more time. Another valuable lesson is the importance of respecting the participatory process and not trying to lead the process with good ideas, which may not be viable if they do not arise from the residents themselves.

Still to Come

The MINVU is currently developing new methodologies to ensure the program’s sustainability once it leaves the neighborhood, including new contracts that stipulate rights and binding duties

among the signatory parties. Also, since older people make up 70 percent of neighborhood leaders, Quiero Mi Barrio is looking for new ways to engage young people in the NCD and its work, such as addressing the challenges of climate change. That said, since many neighborhoods are aging rapidly, the ministry is working closely with the older adult government agency, SENAMA, on issues including investment in new adult daycare centers. Finally, the MINVU is advancing a mentoring program. According to Antonio Fritis, national urban area manager for Quiero Mi Barrio at MINVU, “the whole idea is that when we leave after four years, it is not a mission completed.”

Replicability

The Quiero Mi Barrio model demonstrates the broader impact of physical interventions that intersect with social management programs to increase residents’ ownership of their public and community spaces and their feelings of security and belonging. Strong community participation is critical since it enhances both the legitimacy of the program by responding to residents’ real needs and expectations and its sustainability. At the same time, the implementation of a survey at the beginning and end of the program facilitates the measurement of the genuine impacts on residents.

The multi-level coordination between the program and local and regional levels of government allows for synergies across initiatives. This can increase both the impact of the neighborhood program on its residents and the efficacy of public expenditures. Finally, situating Quiero Mi Barrio within the framework of the Chilean National Urban Development Policy helps to advance the country’s Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Summit, Habitat III, and other global commitments.

For more information:

<https://www.minvu.gob.cl/beneficio/ciudad/programa-de-recuperacion-de-barrios/>