

## Article

# A Bridge with No Name: The Controversial Resignificance of Urban Architectural Heritage from a Gender Perspective in Cuenca (Ecuador)

María del Cisne Aguirre Ullauri <sup>1,\*</sup> , Paula Francisca Rodas Espinoza <sup>2,3</sup>  and Amanda Paulina García Cordero <sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Unidad Académica de Ingeniería, Industria y Construcción, Universidad Católica de Cuenca, Cuenca 010102, Ecuador

<sup>2</sup> Carrera de Tecnología Superior en Gestión Del Patrimonio Histórico Cultural, Instituto Superior Universitario Tecnológico del Azuay, Cuenca 010107, Ecuador; paula.rodas@tecazuay.edu.ec

<sup>3</sup> Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 28040 Madrid, Spain

<sup>4</sup> Facultad de Geografía e Historia, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 28040 Madrid, Spain; amandapg@ucm.es

\* Correspondence: maguirreu@ucacue.edu.ec; Tel.: +593-0983399658

**Abstract:** Urban architectural heritage and its social manifestations are immersed in dynamics beyond their origin and conservation vision. Contemporary society reinterprets, reconfigures and resignifies it according to its own logics of empowerment. In this context, this article addresses the case of a bridge in the Historic Center of Cuenca (Ecuador) known by the names of Mariano Moreno Bridge, La Escalinata Bridge or Vivas Nos Queremos Bridge. It describes its patrimonial situation in terms of its values and its relationship with gender. Because of its social implications, this study is divided into two parts: a bibliographic analysis of the historical evolution of the monument, followed by a discussion of its heritage status, and the presentation of the design, validation and application of a qualitative tool to determine the values associated with the property. This tool is used in a focus group of actors to analyze the feminist activism developed on the bridge between 2020 and 2022. This research shows how cultural heritage can be known, valued and used from an inclusive perspective and how public space can be subject to processes of resignification. This bridge became a non-place, a forgotten and a meaningless site. However, due to the struggle for the vindication of women's rights and freedom of expression, it has taken on a new meaning, becoming an integral part of the contemporary collective imaginary, regardless of its uncertain nomenclature.

**Keywords:** Mariano Moreno; Vivas Nos Queremos; bridge; urban heritage; resignification; cultural value



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## 1. Introduction

The construction of an urban image following the demands of international tourism has defined the success of Cuenca [1] as a historic settlement. As a result, its architecture is part of the refined aesthetic that has historically excluded rural, popular, indigenous, queer and controversial manifestations in multiple Latin American cases. Likewise, gentrification processes, influenced by a strong foreign presence, reproduce colonial social relations and marginalize popular [2] and informal economic activities.

There is a scenario where the middle classes are positioned with higher incomes than the local ones, who, attracted by historical urbanism, displaced the original groups, resulting in an increasing impact on the use and meaning of urban areas [2]. It is not confined to Cuenca (Ecuador) as a phenomenon; intermediate and small cities are also experiencing it. In addition, disputes over public space, gender, identity and class have a long history, and certain passages stand out. The oldest dates back to the colonial establishment when it imposed an urban order characterized by social and spatial segregation [3–6], along with the dispossession of the collective.

By 1980, Cuenca's social elite was shocked by the popular and indigenous appropriation of symbolic urban spaces [7,8]. Approximately a decade later, commercial and architectural elites initiated a "reconquest" based on large investments, which displaced lower-income residents [2]. Nowadays, these spaces resist intertwining formal and informal activities, making it increasingly difficult to separate, forget and purify [9]. There is no denying that Cuenca, like other Latin American cities, is increasingly problematic for local authorities [2], as popular uses of public space, leisure activities and planning ideals clash with the nostalgia of elites. Taking this into account, Ecuador's Organic Law of Culture (Ley Orgánica de Cultura—LOC, in Spanish), which defines cultural heritage as the "dynamic, integrating, representative collection of goods and social practices, which people create, maintain, transmit, and recognize as cultural heritage, communities, communes, nationalities, collectives and cultural organizations" [10], warns against such events.

To address the case of contemporary processes of spatial appropriation and heritage resignification, this research analyzes Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente de La Escalinata or Puente Vivas Nos Queremos, a symbol of urbanization during the twentieth century and a progressive icon for El Ejido area. We propose an analytical and reflexive approach from a heritage, historical and feminist perspective. Due to the scarcity of similar studies in both the city and the country, this position is of particular interest. On the contrary, there is a predominance of historicist [11,12], urban [13–15], architectural [16,17], anthropological [18,19], archaeological [20], mobility [21,22], participatory management [23,24], heritage management and public policy [25–27], and tourism [28–30] studies. In addition, studies related to the right to the city [31,32] have gained relevance in challenging the notion of the historic city.

Consequently, this work contributes to the understanding of contemporary phenomena, including female empowerment and freedom of expression from unauthorized voices, as well as cultural heritage, which is becoming increasingly important for its preservation, exercise of rights and quality of life.

## 2. Cultural Heritage: Conservation Visions and Orientations

In the Historical Center of Cuenca (Centro Histórico de Cuenca—CHC, in Spanish), the concept of regeneration of public space has been adapted as a form of "cleaning" social practices. This institutionalized process has displaced, relegated or forgotten actors, conditions, motivations and more, ultimately, cultural patrimony itself [33]. For Navas and Torres [34], it has been a strategy to strengthen the image of the heritage city as a distinctive brand and to adapt the urban policy to real estate and tourism demand. Therefore, local policies regarding public space use and occupation have been designed to promote tourists rather than citizens. Furthermore, despite institutional attempts to eradicate them, citizens' social use of cultural heritage has survived as a historical legacy, thus reaffirming their right to the city through the process of appropriation [34].

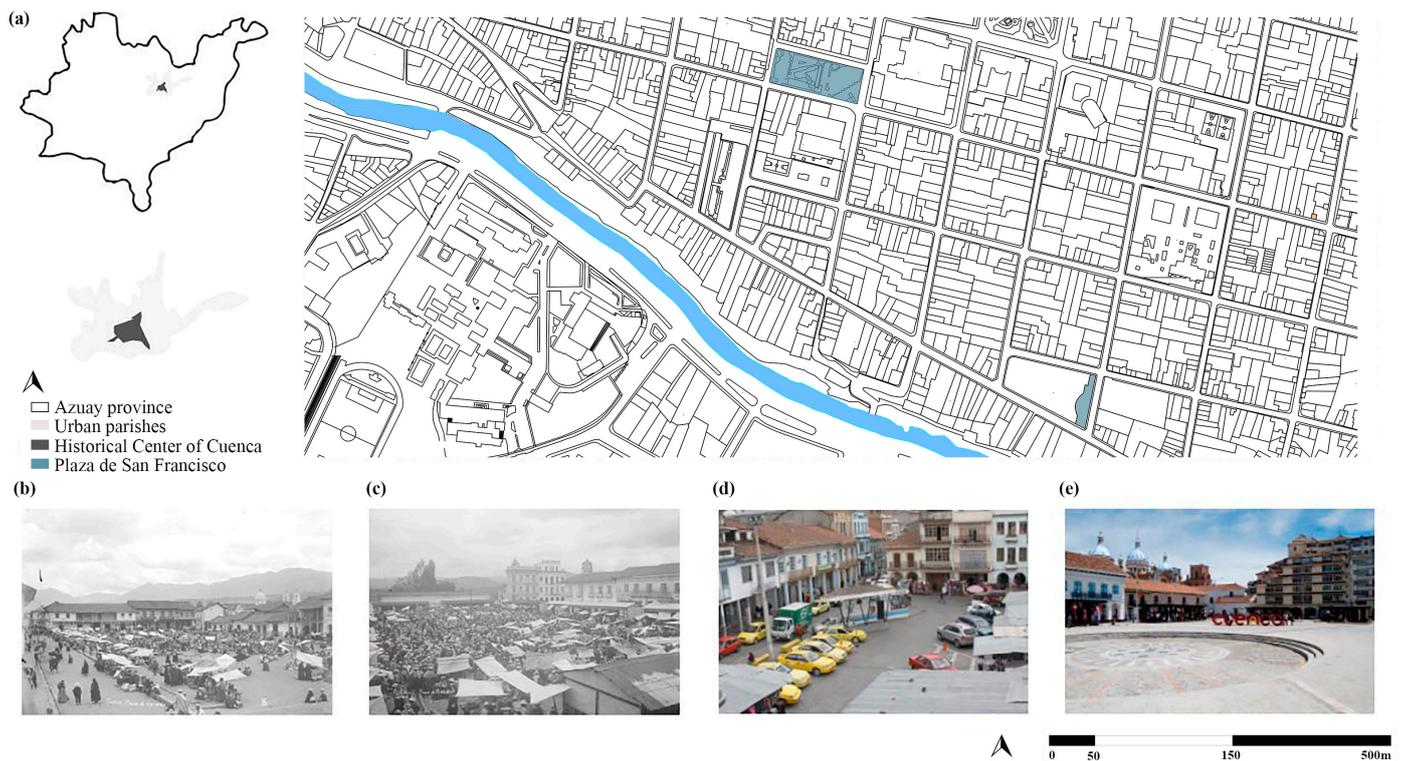
As part of its urban-architectural rehabilitation program framed in plans and projects initially situated around the Tomebamba River [35], the municipal administration created the El Barranco Foundation in 2004 to provide technical assistance in the recovery of public space [36]. As one of the most prominent advocates for traffic calming, this entity is recognized as an obstacle to securing higher commercial and residential rents for historic properties [2]. Several interventions to recover public space have been made since 2008. The most iconic are the modernized squares Cívica, Hermano Miguel, del Rollo, de las Secretas, La Mercedes, San Francisco and del Otorongo (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Location of public space according to the type of intervention in the Historical Center of Cuenca. Own elaboration (2022).

In these cases, the hygienist orientation eliminated the old uses and the displacement of its users, which weakened the social memory and the possibilities of coexistence [31]. Conversely, more conservative interventions have been shown to increase them (Figure 1), such as those in Plaza de San Sebastián, Plaza de San Blas and even Parque Calderón. The Plaza de las Flores, adjacent to the Monastery of El Carmen de la Asunción, is a perfect example of this dichotomy. A series of interventions were conducted between the modernized and conservative sectors due to the widespread rejection of the former and the need to renovate the latter.

On the other hand, Eljuri [18] argues that female occupations in CHC squares are strongly associated with craftsmanship from the perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). In these markets, an asymmetrical male-production and female-commercialization relationship turned many market squares into essentially feminine spaces; however, female workers have been doubly excluded from the hegemonic narratives. Despite these conditions, contemporary urban design and intervention have been limited to reproducing historical strategies, excluding the protagonists and eradicating their features. San Francisco Square, for instance, has been the subject of repeated rehabilitation initiatives since 2006, but these projects have been dismissed by not considering the links between actors and uses. Only in 2017 did the intervention become concrete. The lack of vision regarding intangible heritage values and social use was apparently resolved. However, in practice, historical users are excluded [18], and gender approaches are absent (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The case of the Plaza de San Francisco. (a) Case study location in the Historic Center of Cuenca. (b) Cuenca, San Francisco (Cod. 14096). Fondo Nacional de Fotografía (1920–1930); (c) Cuenca, San Francisco (Cod. 14097). Fondo Nacional de Fotografía (1920–1926); (d) San Francisco prior to urban-architectural interventions. CPM Project, University of Cuenca (2015); (e) San Francisco after urban-architectural interventions (2021). Own elaboration (2022).

Although there has been a permanent interest in recovering public heritage spaces, citizen participation dynamics are rarely incorporated. Alternatively, the regulations and instruments are built and applied within the public administration structure. In this way, disruptive, emergent, spontaneous or unplanned manifestations are presented as an attack on the space's quality and the occupants' well-being. Even though social relevance is recognized in the occupation and transformation of space, little is known about the limitations (or possibilities) that certain historical, social and political factors may represent [31].

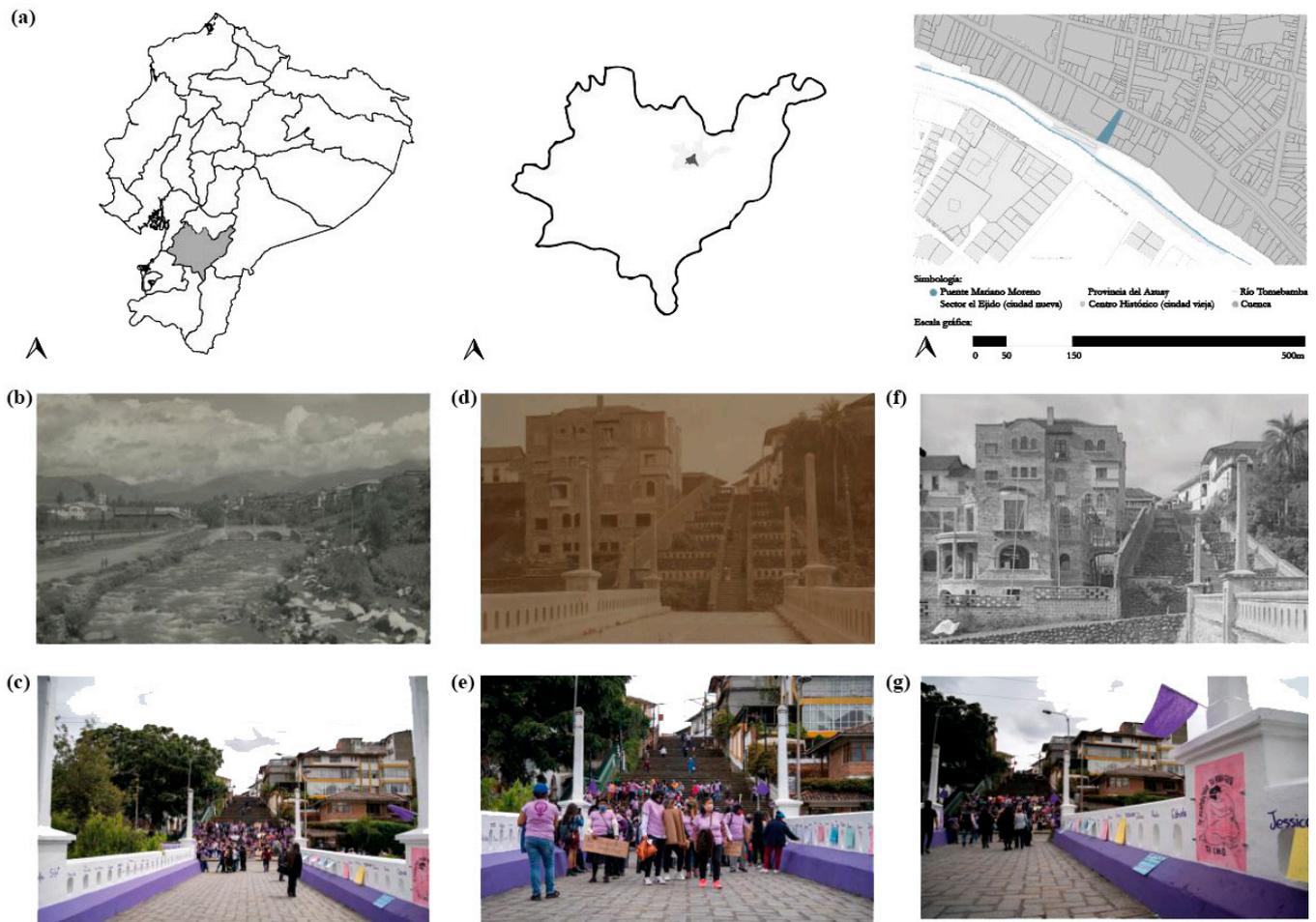
While physical interventions bring indisputable improvements and UNESCO World Heritage status such as that of CHC can be an important stimulus to urban economies [37], they are insufficient to provide livelihoods for all residents or, at least, not for the majority [38], which often exacerbates spatial injustices. Thus, even though the intervention might affect economic dynamics, there are symbolic implications, perhaps even greater than and appropriate for the immaterial dimension of cultural heritage, and by doing so, the "improvements" end up reproducing colonialism [2].

In the end, the recovery of heritage public space has been a function of power groups, including the public administration, being able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate uses [37,39]. Within the framework of the latter, the present study aims to demonstrate the forcefulness with which their presence resignifies the heritage asset.

### 3. Historical Reality: Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente de La Escalinata or Puente Vivas Nos Queremos?

The construction of Puente Mariano Moreno began in 1930 under the direction of Sergio Ojuela, within the framework of a relevant public works program. In the same manner, as a small rural parish of Gualaceo, a city near Cuenca, this bridge took the name of Mariano

Moreno—an illustrious patriot and promoter of public works in the region [40]—who was Governor of Azuay for two occasions (1859 and 1887) [41]. Moreover, it took ten years for the construction to be completed and another ten years for the opening [42] (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** An overview of the study case. (a) Geographical location. Own elaboration (2022); (b) Tomebamba River and El Barranco (Cod. 18606). Source: Fondo Nacional de Fotografía. Museo Pumapungo (1943); (c) Current use of the Puente Mariano Moreno by feminist organizations; (d) Mariano Moreno Bridge (Cod. 17049). Source: Fondo Nacional de Fotografía. Museo Pumapungo (1943); (e) Current use of the Puente Mariano Moreno by feminist organizations. Source: Authors (2022).; (f) Stereoscopic view of the Tomebamba River (Cod. 12890). Source: Fondo Nacional de Fotografía. Serrano, M.J. (1940–1950); (g) Current use of Puente Mariano Moreno by feminist organizations. Source: Authors (2022). Own elaboration (2022).

The need for such infrastructure arose from the growth of the El Ejido area. The Public Works Board of Azuay (La Junta de Obras Públicas del Azuay) stimulated the construction of La Escalinata Francisco Sojos Jaramillo and the replacement of the modest Tarqui bridge [41] as a recent means of accessing the current Historical Center, Paseo Tres de Noviembre and boulevard 12 de Abril, which precedes an avenue of the same name (Figure 3). Since then, despite the predominance of vehicles, it has been mainly used by pedestrians [43] due to the section's narrowness and the area's daily dynamics. The most representative activities were the washing of clothes, the drying of hats, and agriculture, which intensified progressively and was confirmed as an effective means of communication between river banks only in 1940. Sports activities would confirm this link from the 1980s onwards with the launch of Olympic walking.

There have been many historical events associated with the bridge; it survived the Tomebamba river flood, which destroyed the Todos Santos (Puente Roto) and El Vergel [42] bridges, likely due to its quality materials and execution, as well as being part of Cuenca's First Regulatory Plan in the late 19th century. The bridge has two slightly lowered arches with two lanes framed by plinths, rectangular columns and luminaires; it was constructed of boulders, brick and lime. These materials are particularly visible on the pavement and on the top surface, where the starts and supports are also highlighted, as well as the thick parapet with an oval-shaped balustrade.

In terms of urban infrastructure, the bridge marks the transition from one zone to another and distinguishes the old city from the new one (Figure 3). The northern area is commercial and administrative; the southern area is commercial, entertainment, and residential [42]. In addition to being the natural border, El Barranco is also the Tomebamba River corridor and contains buildings that have been adapting to the topography, demonstrating particular conformity to the natural landscape [44]. The area is currently primarily commercial; touristic; and to a lesser extent, residential. As the bridge is integrated into the landscape, cultural events such as craft gatherings, festivals and fairs are generally held on civic dates.

This scenario emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage, public space and social manifestations. The area's transformation has favored it since 2004, which was accentuated by the 2013 intervention of the Parque de la Madre. However, it was only after events promoted by the local feminist movement that it regained visibility between August 2020 and March 2021. The #MeToo or La Marea Verde [45] took the site to protest violence against girls and women in cases that shocked the local society<sup>1</sup>. On 11 September 2020, messages in support of abortion legalization were posted. However, the action provoked a heated discussion and re-establishing of its previous aesthetics. Similar situations have occurred with the participation of public forces on a permanent basis, evidencing the contrasts of local society. At the same time, spaces such as the bridge are part of the city's living heritage, where new generations can appropriate and generate meanings [46].

The National Institute of Cultural Heritage [47] maintains a heritage asset file; however, it does not provide a comprehensive interpretation of heritage values. Furthermore, the document does not define limitations regarding physical changes observed or possible since it is not an effective conservation instrument. Moreover, there is no explicit inventory or record from the local administration in this context. However, based on the year of its construction and the literal law of art, 54 of the LOC [10], it falls into the category of national heritage. In 1982, the Historic Center was declared a national heritage site, and in 1999, it was designated as one of a set of World Heritage Sites: therefore, the heritage status of this building is legally defined, because it is one of a group of buildings constructed before 1940.

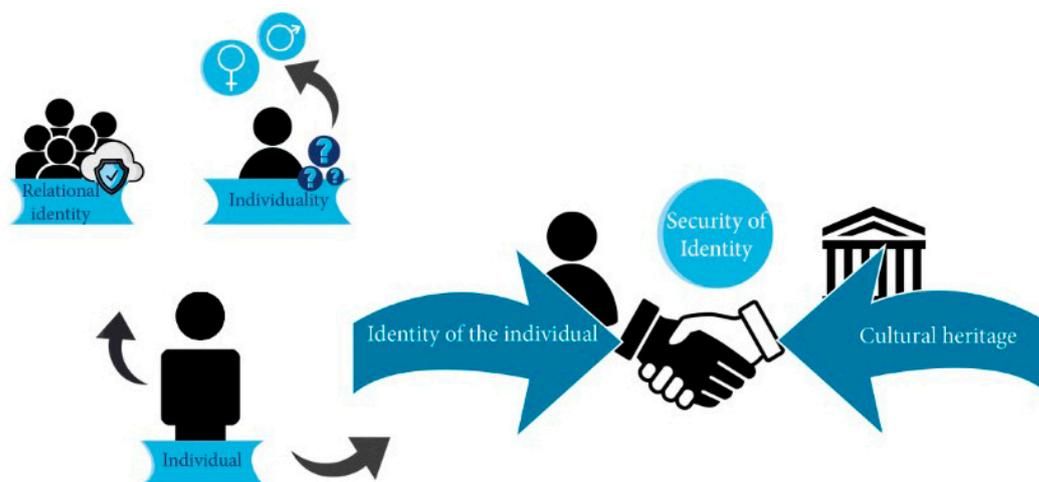
Aside from the administrative and regulatory perspective, also relevant is the bridge as a social asset. In recognition of the International Day for Non-violence against Women, the bridge was symbolically renamed Puente Vivas Nos Queremos<sup>1</sup> by adding a commemorative plaque [48]. This aspect is distinct from the conventional meaning of heritage. Nonetheless, the conjuncture revives the asset's historical and symbolic value by bringing together groups and activities with subtle changes [49] that represent access, use and appropriation regardless of historical conventions such as urban nomenclature.

#### 4. New Approach: Gender Perspective and Resignification

Cities can be understood as the union of social, economic and cultural factors specific to those who inhabit them, resulting in the construction of identity processes connected to space [50]. To understand the link between people and the world around them, one must consider their identity and three additional aspects: (1) the selfhood of the individual, (2) the group relationship, and (3) the understanding and acceptance of global changes [51]. In general, identity can represent people's idea of who they are, what the world is, and

the security it provides them. This concept changes depending on the level of control over global logic and material security [52].

To resolve the uncertainty of a reality that can be inextricable, a certain search for identity originates in which the individual chooses cultural heritage. That resource can adapt to the rational and scientific concept of the world. At the same time, it does not represent an object that would produce subordination, keeping the essence of individuality based on autonomy. Therefore, cultural heritage is presented as a bridge to unite people with the past and, at the same time, guarantee them a future [53]; therefore, heritage assets are shown as a reflection of the passage of time; they become, unconsciously, instruments that lead people to feeling that they are part of a whole (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Identity relationship between individuals and cultural heritage. Source: [50–53]. Own elaboration (2022).

When speaking of cultural heritage as an element of identity, the social value should be emphasized as its *raison d'être* since it is the people who decide to protect and preserve it [54] or, failing that, to destroy and replace it. These facts explain the importance of the social–public spaces link as representatives of identity and well-being. In addition, the city-users' relationship generates urban and architectural impacts [55], and it is society's axis to understand its configuration, dynamics and transformation over time. To understand the socio-spatial relationship, identity development must be considered as a dynamic cultural and historical framework between the individual and the social [56].

In this sense, two determining groups stand out: (1) societies of low socio-economic complexity and (2) the individual human being. The former is characterized by relational identity and are complex systems of interpellations and recognitions [57] supported by the collectivity to feel certainty and stability towards that which they cannot control without differentiating between men and women. The latter becomes visible as work becomes more specialized; men become individualized, while women remain in the role of relational identity, which finally represents female gender identity. Unlike the security that permanence in relational identity generates, men's individualization provides evidence of changes and transformation as synonyms of productivity and development.

In this way, the identity conception has presented a clear relationship with aspects such as gender or race [58]. Female identity is a construction; however, the individualized and patriarchal context in which societies have developed has linked women to an expressive and affective role, limiting their instrumental role and, therefore, the fulfillment of various goals [59]. According to Marx, women are included in the group of oppressed people, also defined as "others"; they are part of minorities and disadvantaged collectives [60]. This derives from the telling of history from an androcentric perspective [61], which has relegated the female figure from representations with which people identify themselves at an individual as well as collective level.

In response, feminism emerges as a movement in search of real equality between sexes; it goes through several processes or waves that seek its achievement: the first from the recognition and struggle against the bureaucratic state, capitalism and the patriarchal family [62]; the second for the valuation of women as subjects at the institutional and cultural level, allowing them to participate in political, economic and social spheres [63]. The third deals with inequality between men and women and the lack of recognition of the female collective, and the fourth emphasizes the struggle of women against violence [64] escalating in recent decades [65]. The last two waves are of particular interest in terms of the processes of valuation and resignification of cultural heritage today, and in both cases, the revaluation of women is the starting point for new social construction.

However, it is also important to note that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [66] establishes measures to limit actions based on the idea of inferiority–superiority of the sexes or stereotyped roles; however, traditional cultural practices are not considered a threat or do not contribute to discrimination against women. Entities such as UNESCO have worked on issues inherent to inclusion and equity, as well as on respect for the principle of non-discrimination in human groups in terms of gender. In this sense, it is appropriate to analyze how to redefine public spaces, social spaces par excellence, from a gender perspective and concerning cultural heritage to offer conservation scenarios as social dynamics have changed [67]. Particularly, the role of women in ICH contributes significantly; access and participation of expressions are determined by gender, and this is the ideal context for the shaping and transmitting roles and identities [68,69]. In addition, equality and non-discrimination are fundamental human rights; therefore, in ICH, we should not focus on the different gender roles but on preventing them from undermining the dignity and well-being of the actors [68].

For its part, from the socio-spatial relations, contemporaneity exposes several cases of potential resignification and positive impacts from the gender approach (Table 1), such as the case of the Plaza de la Constitución in Mexico City, whose strategic location allows for solving political, financial, administrative and urban problems. From this, the linking of political and social activities evidences a change in the use patterns [70]. Thanks to the 2008 intervention, the space improved; the inclusion of urban lighting elements guarantees free mobility for people with disabilities [71], deriving great success. In addition, it is currently influenced by gender and diversity in planning urban environments, improving safety and social integration. That is, it is consolidated as a versatile node for the changing activities of the year [72].

Another example is the Plaza de la República in Maracaibo, in which the political and civic use serves as an articulating axis for cultural and commemorative meetings, to which recreational activities and artistic performances are added [73]. This coupling is typical of the contemporary city, which adapts to globalization and replaces traditional activities. To achieve this, spaces and societies go through transitions that may or may not be successful; in the Venezuelan case, spatial transformation is a reference for the various activist and social groups that gather there [65]. Likewise, and as part of the understanding of the impact of gender in the urban environment, the Joan Miró Park in Barcelona has become a landmark for the meeting of feminist groups, despite the fact that the space does not consider any of their needs, the implementation of vegetation and public lighting has generated a safe environment and, therefore, greater accessibility [74,75].

In the previous context, Lugo et al. [76] evidenced the links in light of two questions: how do women and men participate in the conservation of cultural heritage in the community, and what is the importance of cultural heritage for territorial development with gender equity? Moreover, it is defined that women should be considered as social actors to vindicate their rights and create support networks that contribute to territorial development, not only to achieve social, economic and political equality. To this end, it is important to understand that the appropriation and shaping of urban spaces arise as consequences of individual and group identity relationships with their environment [77]. However, and although this relationship is logical, the urbanism of contemporary cities

includes patriarchal orientations and privileges; there is a differentiation between men and women regarding the use of public space due to time and space restrictions [72], especially due to behavioral patterns assumed by each one, which produces gender inequalities and intersectionality [78].

**Table 1.** Analysis references Source: [71–73,75]. Own elaboration (2022).



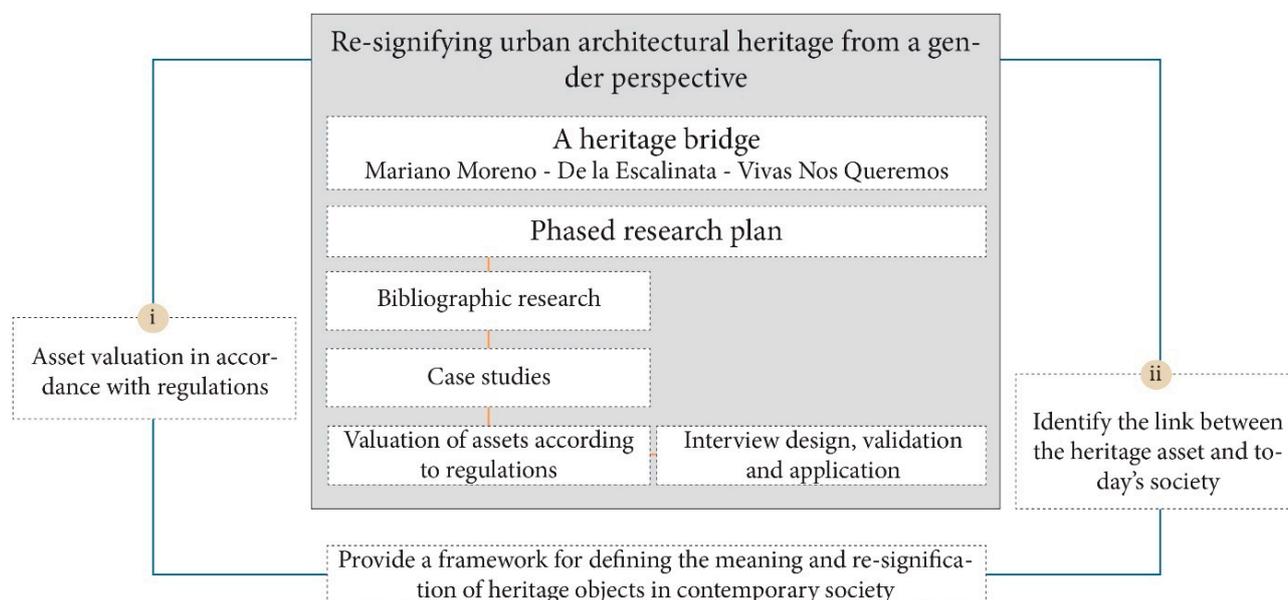
Case Study	1. Plaza de la República (Maracaibo, Venezuela)	2. Plaza de la Constitución (Ciudad de México, México)	3. Parque Joen Miró (Barcelona, España)
Heritage Condition	The Law for the Protection and Defense of Cultural Heritage of Venezuela [3], in its General Register of Cultural Heritage, categorizes the square as a type of Material Asset or Tangible Cultural Heritage.	The Law of Cultural, Natural and Biocultural Heritage of Mexico City [4] defines this square as Material Cultural Heritage in the category of Architectural Cultural Heritage.	The Law 9/1993, of 30 September 1993, of the Catalan Cultural Heritage [5], defines the park as an Asset of Local Cultural Interest, with the category of Property Asset for its sculpture Dona i Ocell.
Conventional Use	Place of reference for social, cultural and civic events and protests.	It is used as a political and religious center and has been the site of notable events in Mexican history.	Museum; citizen guard; sports, cultural and educational activities.
Contemporary Use	Epicenter of civic events, festivities and protests. Popular action activities for the formulation of inclusive and gender laws.	Concentration site for social and cultural events. Activism for Afro-descendant women and youth training activities for political advocacy.	Training space for women and their bodies, breaking the canons of beauty, aesthetic stereotypes and health.
Temporal dynamics of use	The square is open 24 h a day. Every 5 July, the national independence is celebrated and takes on a symbolic character due to the tribute to the national identity and honoring the states that make up the Republic of Venezuela.	The square is open 24 h a day. It hosts ceremonies to honor and raise the flag on 24 February, 15 and 16 September, and 20 November, representative dates in Mexico.	The park is open from 10:00am. Accessibility is limited at night, so it closes at 23:00.
Feminist groups	La Araña Feminista Tinta Violeta Movimiento de Mujeres de Mérida Colectivo Josefa Joaquina Sánchez Colectivo Apacuana Mujeres por la Vida	Colectivo Palabras de Arena Ateneo Mexicano de Mujeres Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer ONG Conectadas Mx	Democrática de la Mujer Association Federación de Organizaciones Feministas Unión para la Liberación de la Mujer Colectivo Feministas de Barcelona Organización Feminista Revolucionaria
Other minority groups	Workers Students Social protest groups Itinerant vendors Artist Artisans	Children Young people Men Women Elderly people	Social groups (sports clubs) LGBTIQ+ groups Climate change activist organization

In opposition, feminism from urbanism proposes that the design of public spaces complies with urban policies of social diversity and responds to the differentiated needs of individuals, promoting the gender dimension from a collective approach that improves the quality of life [79]. In fact, in the complexity of today's society, the conception and use of public space are immersed in a broad framework of demands, needs and aspirations, which become more complex when dealing with spaces of heritage character, such as the Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente de La Escalinata or Puente Vivas Nos Queremos.

## 5. Materials and Methods

This research is primarily qualitative, with a descriptive, explanatory and relational framework. Using the case study as a research technique is an effective strategy to analyze heritage assets such as Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente de La Escalinata or Puente Vivas Nos Queremos, as an iconic scenario of feminist activism in Cuenca (Ecuador), particularly between the years 2020 and 2022.

The research process designed and applied is compatible with formal scientific research and its rigor [80]; therefore, it allows for describing in breadth from historical and theoretical inputs that symbolic appropriation has occurred due to the lack of citizen meeting spaces and how the different feminist collectives affect the construction of meanings. According to Carrasco [81], it would be descriptive social research, whose objective is to expose the characteristics of the social phenomenon in a specific spatio-temporal context [82]. The first phase includes a general bibliographic analysis (object, referents and concepts), the reading of the monument through time and its heritage valuation derived from the regulations. The second phase designs, validates and applies a qualitative tool to determine the values associated with the asset according to a focus group made up of key actors from academia, public administration, feminist groups, professionals, neighbors and citizens in general (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Research methodological structure towards urban heritage and gender perspective. Own elaboration (2022).

### 5.1. Phase 1

It develops the historical bibliographic research on the object of study and its context from local and national sources, without a specific time frame, since it seeks to characterize the object from its historical, architectural and heritage dimensions according to the authorized discourse [83,84]. In addition, three sub-phases are included; the first one is associated with the analysis of the scientific production, mainly from the last 5 years,

employing a systematic search associated with the descriptors Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente Vivas Nos Queremos, Puente de La Escalinata, gender and cultural heritage, urban heritage, resignification and cultural value.

The second sub-phase relates similarities in terms of social problems: (a) Plaza de la República (Venezuela), (b) Plaza de la Constitución (Mexico) and (c) Parque Joan Miró (Spain). The selection is based on the determination of the incidence of the gender approach in public spaces, the activities they host and the contribution of feminism from urbanism in order to contrast the reality of appropriation and resignification. Based on the two previous sub-phases, the third phase carries out a heritage valuation exercise according to the criteria of the national regulations, applying four criteria and their different sub-criteria (Table 2). In the end, a degree of heritage protection [85] is established.

**Table 2.** Criteria for heritage valuation in public spaces [85]. Own elaboration (2022).

Heritage Assessment	
Criteria	Sub-criteria
Age	Period of construction
Physical–spatial conformation	Use and function
	Form and design
	Conservation state
	Authenticity and integrity
Contextual value	Urban generator or articulator
	Contribution to the urban image of the site
	Relationship with the urban-architectural environment
	Integration with the natural environment
Historical–testimonial–symbolism	Related to historical events
	Landmark or urban reference

The quantification of the criteria and sub-criteria fluctuates between scores of 1 and 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, according to the following: very high valuation range: 5; high: 4; medium: 3; low: 2; and very low: 1 [85]. Based on the partial scores, a sum is added to determine the degree of protection of the asset according to the following ranges: 0 to 15: no protection (i.e., the asset is not heritage property); 16 to 30: conditional protection; 31 to 45: partial protection; and 46 to 55, absolute protection. These processes make up the so-called Baremo Scale, an official protection instrument of a quantitative nature and qualitative basis.

## 5.2. Phase 2

Phase 2 seeks to broaden the view of the value and significance of the object of study. To operationalize this component, a general perception survey is applied and validated by means of expert judgment. In detail, experts in the areas of history, heritage architecture, urban planning, anthropology, politics and statistics evaluated the clarity, coherence, sufficiency and relevance of the instrument's content in two rounds. Based on this, the qualitative tool includes 16 questions (2 open and 14 closed) to measure the perception of the values associated with the asset. The closed questions use a Likert scale (between 1 and 5), where 1 is not at all relevant or irrelevant, 2 is scarcely relevant, 3 is not very relevant, 4 is relevant and 5 is very relevant. In addition, it is accompanied by a sub-scale that describes the variation in perception between positive (4 and 5), indifferent (3) and negative (1 and 2).

The survey was applied to a focus group of key actors from academia, public administration, feminist groups, professionals, neighbors and citizens in general. This group, made up of 11 members, is included within the ideal range recommended by Escobar and Bonilla

Jiménez [86], i.e., between 3 and 12 people. With this participation, the qualitative tool needs to include compliance with (1) free and informed consent, (2) confidentiality of the information, and (3) respect for the anonymity of the participants [87]. Likewise, in those cases in which the information of a social nature comes from documentary sources, as in Phase 1, the principles of situated ethics from qualitative social research are considered, including how sensitive accounts should be treated to ensure respect for the integrity and dignity of people, and not to threaten the social welfare or the rights of communities [88].

Between the two phases, it is possible to expose the framework of the meaning of the object of study from different edges, with the vision of building the heritage–gender relationship as a determinant of conservation in the contemporary city.

## 6. Results and Discussion

Spaces with a deep-rooted social memory and a strong sense of identity and belonging foster interactions and social organization. These two behaviors are accentuated in those connective assets and with conditions of centrality [31], as is the case of a bridge. In Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente de la Escalinata or Puente Vivas Nos Queremos, the dispute between the traditional dynamics of the use and occupation in relation to those disruptive ones typical of contemporary society has been framed. In the latter, a group of women express a political stance that questions the established codes of coexistence, female behavior, and traditional ways of valuing cultural heritage. In the words of Lefebvre [89], this is a positive appropriation that includes a constant intervention of those interested in the full exercise of rights and freedoms.

Such is the positioning of this action that it is not enough to reverse the aesthetics associated with feminist mourning. Still, the symbolic presence of the public force is necessary to establish the limits of space occupation. These types of expressions of power would evidence the multiple interests that are debated [89] over an invisible and unnoticed heritage artefact until 2 years ago, if it were not for its capacity to connect opposite ends of the city, that is, for its value of use or relationship with another asset, the Escalinata Francisco Sojos Jaramillo.

Under this consideration, what is the true social memory of the asset, and what is it that makes identity and sense of belonging possible? For the conservative segment of society, it is the celebration of the male figure of a famous politician, who gave his name to the bridge capable of resisting the traumatic flooding of the Tomebamba River in 1950, ratifying the personal mark of “Julián Matadero” [90], that ennobles the city and ratifies the progressive sense of the Castilian city. For others, it is the definition of a “movement of a new type” with imminent impact on public opinion [45] and, therefore, a new meaning and a new heritage definition capable of intensifying. Moreover, the rejection of the increase in violence, the impunity in the treatment of crimes, the normalization of this situation and the expansion of animosity of groups of men against women [45] cannot go unnoticed.

Considering that the feminist collective includes a diversity of participants, groups, organizations and individuals, the common orientation towards the bridge stands out for its significance regardless of age, race, education, or another category of population stratification or demographic characterization. Even beyond the levels of administrative regularization, formal petition [91]<sup>2</sup> or civic demand, the exercise of freedom of expression and respect for the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot be negotiated. However, it is certainly opposed to the aesthetic, symbolic, artistic and social logics of appropriating space and enhancing cultural heritage.

In this sense, and after the marked influence of patriarchal capitalism, the establishment of a structure that values the importance of the gender perspective and the public presence of women is crucial, thereby establishing solid foundations for a responsible and inclusive future for everyone, regardless of age, gender and origins [92]. While it is true that evidence shows that women and men exhibit different behaviors in public spaces, the physical structure of a city can reflect and amplify social inequalities or, on the contrary, can create more equal environments [72]. Cases such as Plaza de la República (Venezuela),

Plaza de la Constitución (Mexico) and Joan Miró Park (Spain) (Table 1) confirm this not only from the rhetoric of the right to public space in the city but also from the practice of respect for fundamental guarantees such as peace and freedom. Certainly, weaknesses do not always come from legal or administrative fragility but also from the inability to implement and develop general principles in an adequate framework. In Ecuador and Latin America, in the last two decades, legislation has been passed in favor of women, thanks to the actions undertaken by national women's movements (both political and social, fundamentally) and feminists, in particular, accompanied by the response of international organizations [93].

On the other hand, concerning cultural heritage and its relation to gender equality, it is not always possible to speak of social inequalities or of any other kind, since, at least in the manifestations related to ICH, there are certain roles that are exclusive to men or women and cannot be considered discriminatory merely for this reason. However, this approach has always focused on women's participation. Still, it has not been analyzed from the perspective of discrimination or segregation that may exist in relation to the material heritage or the social use of public space in specific historical contexts. Therefore, by describing the heritage condition of the case study, concrete implications of its management and conservation can be quantified, such as limitations or possibilities for appropriation and empowerment.

In this matter, and in official terms, the Scale of Baremo (Table 2) defines a score of 45 as a type of partial protection (Table 3). This indicates that the asset is certainly heritage because of its intrinsic characteristics and not merely due to its inclusion in a larger urban architectural complex, as it has been formally considered to date. The historical-testimonial-symbolism sub-criterion is particularly relevant, since having overcome the broad theoretical and practical debates on heritage significance, the tangible and intangible dimensions are complementary, indissoluble and of equal relevance, so that the mere physical support of what is believed to be heritage is not appropriate. This would lead to disregarding attributes and values, as well as cultural rights themselves, which are part of the so-called second-generation human rights [94], promoted to ensure that people and communities have access to culture and heritage, as well as to guarantee participation in those cultural manifestations of their choice.

In Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente de La Escalinata or Puente Vivas Nos Queremos, it is necessary to recognize the social and spatial dynamics that are part of everyday life, which promote processes of social appropriation, resignification and symbolic value [95], enjoyment of culture and its components under conditions of equality, human dignity and non-discrimination [96]. These include verifying the impact on the physical-spatial dimension of the good without compromising it (Figure 3); on the contrary, autonomy is guaranteed and relational identity is overcome.

In addition, by understanding that cultural rights have a main and undisputed addressee—the human being [94]—it is not intended that the definition of their contemporary meanings be evaluated as superfluous or frivolous due to their genesis and effervescence. On the contrary, as it is a right that attends to a need of public character [97] and evidences a progressive report of the diverse scenarios of value coming from Figure 6, it reflects a sort of socio-cultural palimpsest, which rather than generating a rupture, promotes a transition supported by the trust that, as a society, we expect to receive from the political power to eliminate any kind of arbitrariness [97] that limits it.

In this framework, and when considering the current state of the bridge and the intrinsic attributes of authenticity, integrity, uniqueness and importance derived from the historical fluctuations of the values, there is no affectation or diminution. On the contrary, according to the historical dynamics itself, it is a temporal hierarchical arrangement of priorities that reinforces its unitary character. Thus, such characteristics describe from its temporary vocation the particular meaning for the different societies for which it fulfilled a function derived from its historical, artistic, scientific or social symbolic significance [98] (Table 3). This, in turn, confirms two particulars; the first is that the physical dimension of the asset has not been affected by feminist activism or by any other social activity which has

occupied the space. The second refers to the fact that heritage values cannot be understood outside the established social relations, but not all values are shared by these relations [46].

**Table 3.** Evaluation of Puente Mariano Moreno, Puente de La Escalinata or Puente Vivas Nos Queremos according to the Scale of Baremo. Source: [85]. Own elaboration (2022).

Baremo Scale							
Age	Grade	Score	Heritage Valuation and Degrees of Protection			Heritage value	
Colonial—16th–19th century	5		No	Score	45	Degree of protection	
Republican 1–19th century	4		1	46–55		Contains heritage value	
Republican 2–20th century	3	x	3	2	31–45		Partial Protection
Republican 3–21st century	2			3	16–30		
			3	4	00–15		
Physical–spatial conformation							
Form and design	4	x	4				
Authenticity and integrity	4	x	4				
Conservation state	4	x	4				
Use and function	5	x	5				
			17				
Contextual value							
Contribution to the shaping of the site’s image	5	x	4				
Urban generators or articulators	5	x	5				
Relationship with the urban-architectural environment	5	x	5				
Integration with the natural environment	4	x	4				
			18				
Historical–testimonial–symbolism							
Represents a landmark or urban landmark	4	x	4				
Related to historical events	3	x	3				
			7				

Assessment diagram: bar chart	
Historical-Testimonial-Symbolic	1
Contextual value	4
Physical-spatial conformation	6
Age	2

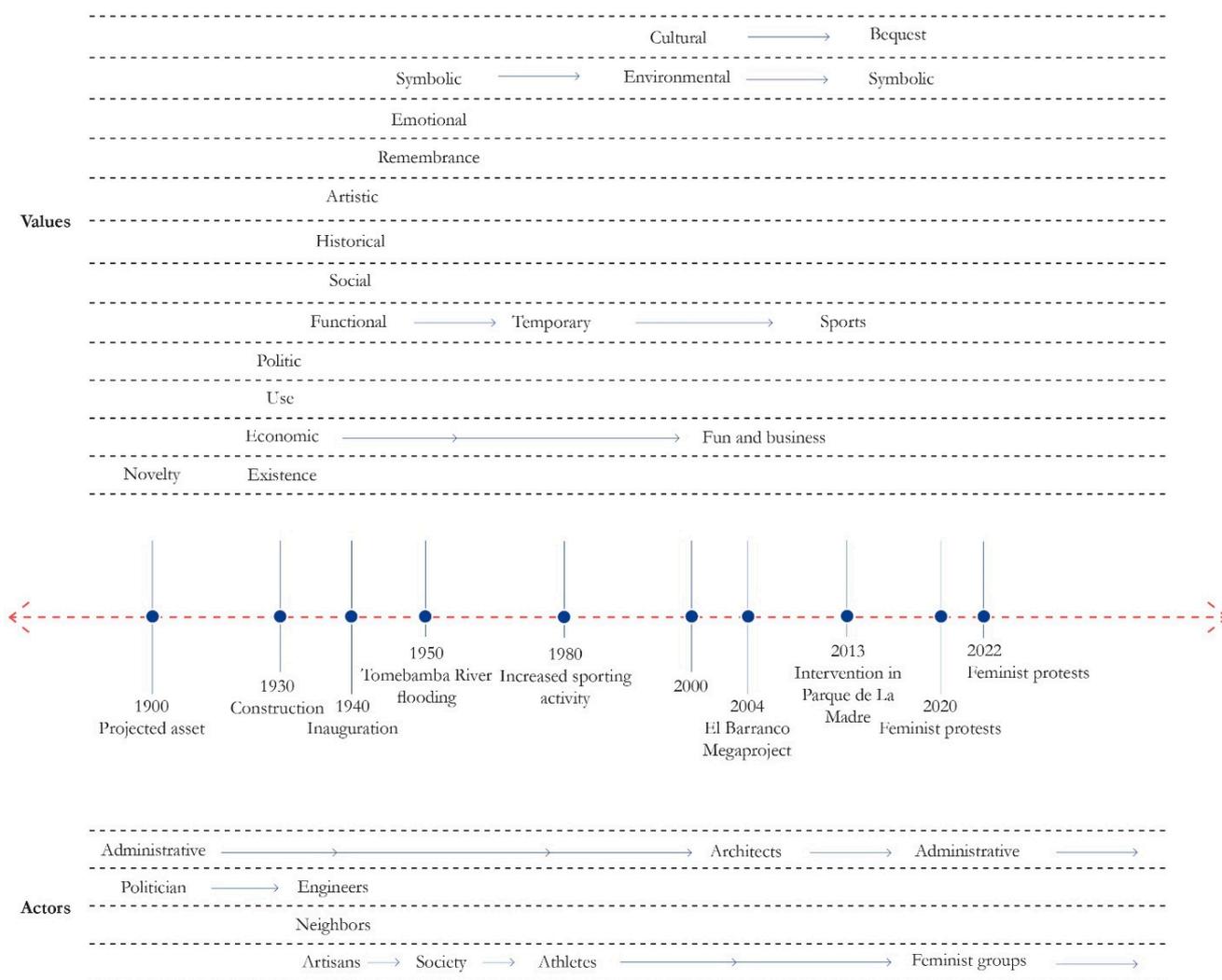
Photograph of the public space valued	
	

This fact is so clear that, despite the ignorance of some characteristic, attribute or value, it is possible to observe their tacit temporary existence in addition to their dynamic mutation in the future. Therefore, the participation of active subjects in the research-action process enables the generation of operational initiatives to promote the achievement of social demands [88], as well as the legitimate exercise of rights and guarantees. In this framework, the inclusion of the complex focus group refers to the following:

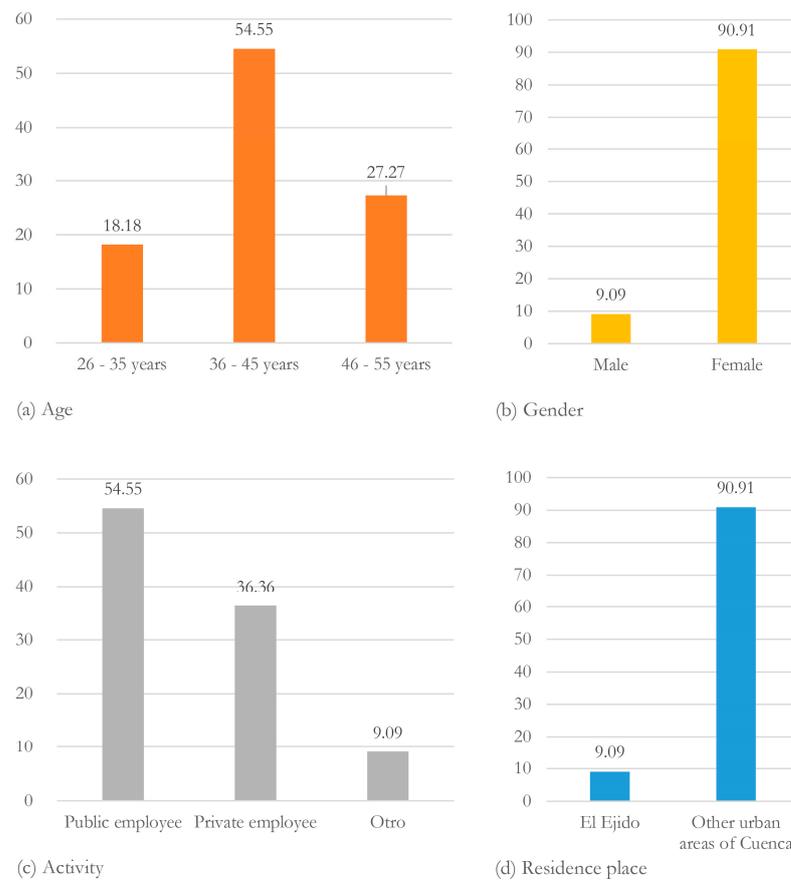
1. Regardless of age, gender, professional activity and place of residence (Figure 7), there is full awareness of its existence and links (positive or negative) to it. In other words, it is associated with citizens’ activities, desires and imaginaries without the intermediation of physical proximity, formal education or a particular personal affinity.
2. The asset knowledge is enhanced when a potential change of meaning is thought to be opportune (91%), but it is unknown about its potential change of name (36.4%), relevance (50%) or potential impact on the conditions of the value of the asset (50%). In other words, although there is a positive trend (Figure 8), the practices, scenarios and dynamics related to cultural heritage are not universal or, failing that, are overshadowed by the political delegitimization of feminist public discourses, typical of the hegemony of temporal privilege [58].
3. The recognition of feminist social groups as actors in the public space is evident (72.7%) and could be discussed for the CHC in general (27.3%). Still, in the case of the bridge, it is overwhelming (90%) as well as the feminine presence itself (90%). This contrariety

indicates that taking into account the case of public spaces in Cuenca, the neoliberal conception mentioned by Navas and Torres [34] has resulted in their transformation into “non-places” [99], that is, spaces of transition, where urban policies have distorted the social use. This was, at least for some decades, the situation of the studied asset, which ceases to be seen as an instrument for commuting and communication to position a discourse and a forceful agenda, thereby being reconfigured as an anthropological place. In addition, to be seen as a meeting space, it remains as a catalyst for the transformation of the communal meaning of both itself and the surrounding assets. Ultimately, the positive trend (Figure 8) confirms that this is the place of local feminists.

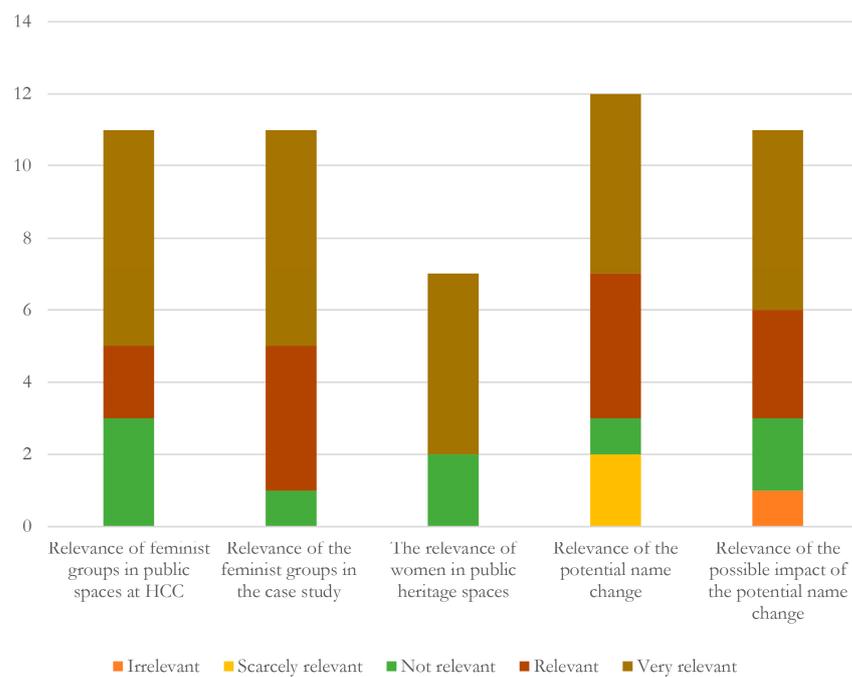
4. The intrinsic heritage condition of the asset, regardless of specific facts or its particular value, is given by the confluence of both material and immaterial values, which are self-regulated according to transitions or time intervals [100] (Figure 6). Thus, such fluctuations reflect not only the early notion of progress but also the explosive nature of feminist activism. They have settled in the citizen’s imaginary and arise from a historical process (Figure 9) in such a way that their existence and relevance for the totalitarian definition of the asset is possible and predominantly positive.



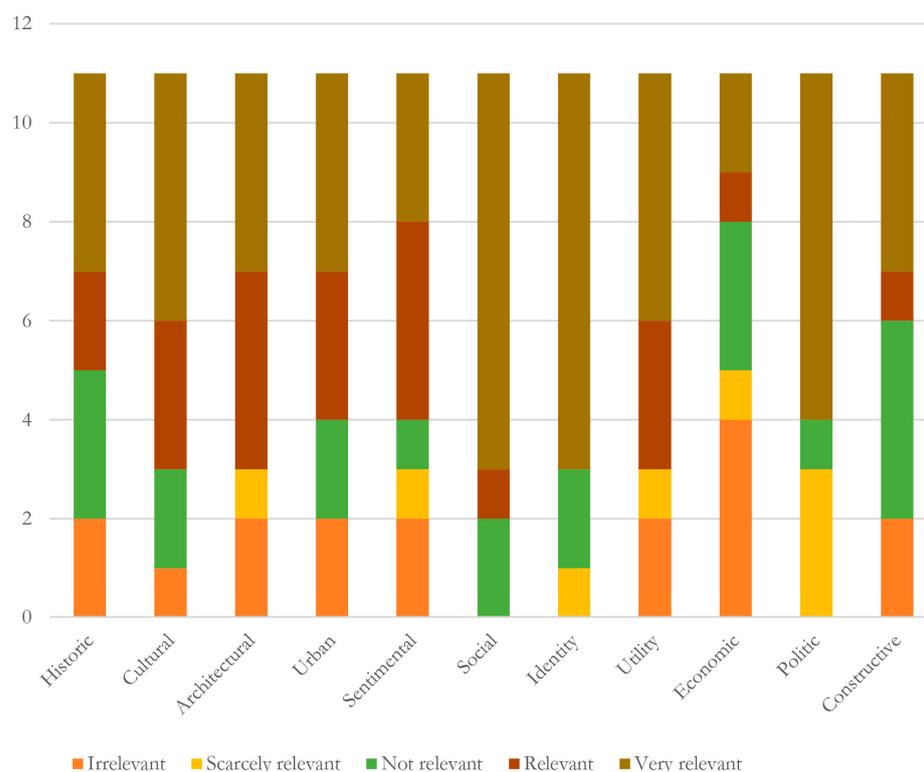
**Figure 6.** An overview of the evolution of heritage values in the case study. Source and elaboration: Authors (2022).



**Figure 7.** Demographic composition of the focus group participants. (a) Age of participants. (b) Gender with which participants identify. (c) Occupational activity of participant. (d) Place of residence of participants. Source and elaboration: Authors (2022).



**Figure 8.** Global report on perception in public spaces based on the case study and feminist actors. Elaboration: Authors (2022).



**Figure 9.** Global report on the case study's meanings. Source and elaboration: Authors (2022).

Additionally, what is demonstrated in terms of positive perception with signs of increase (Figures 7–9) is complemented by the recognition that the bridge as a public space is affected in its static material dimension by the feminist presence. However, this is not detrimental, as it ratifies the dynamic condition of life and its expressions and, therefore, of cultural heritage and its vocation to synthesize those expressions into recognizable values over time.

In the case of the CHC, its associated heritage areas and the case of the bridge, the heritage status is based on the recognition of unique values, but its definition is solely administrative. It lacks a participatory process such as the one exposed in this research. Without this process, it is not possible to accept with a critical and tolerant view the forms of cultural expression as articulating instruments of social coexistence [33]; therefore, its powerful visibility generates social friction; despite this, rewriting history becomes fundamental as an act of exercising rights and claiming inheritances. Considering global concern, adding a gender perspective to the new worldwide development structure has become necessary [69].

## 7. Conclusions

This article presents an example of a heritage asset that is currently contested. As its history has evolved, its immaterial value has continued to develop over time, acquiring values that reflect the reality of those who frequent the site. This piece's materiality and state of conservation reflect its permanence in different age groups, as well as the importance of freedom of expression to all individuals. This study illustrates the importance and influence of urban heritage by using the bridge as a medium between social reality and the population. Despite several attempts to maintain a neutral character in the material state of the bridge, the socio-spatial dynamics indicate strong empowerment that disrupts it both in the present and likely in the future. In this context, the name change proposal is ratified in the basis of its existing social value over historical, constructive or architectural values.

On the other hand, the architectural structure of Puente Mariano Moreno or Puente de La Escalinata determines the transition from one urban structure to another, from one

era to another and from one society to another. It is the same with Puente Vivas Nos Queremos, although the disruptions generated are considered aggressive and informal by the most conservative segment of Cuenca. The bridge, however, integrates and is incorporated into a wide range of historical and human representations that evidence its significance both instrumentally and socially; that is to say, regardless of its name, it is a natural scenario of resignification and redefinition of its own vocation to the service of the society extended in time. Based on this, the heritage condition cannot be disputed; it is not determined by historical or current administrative constraints. The appropriation; the sense of permanence; and in a certain way, the very custody of the asset define it. In addition to the nomenclature, which serves no purpose other than to illustrate the symbolic generational association over time and consequently enhanced with the passing of time, there is no infringing action from the feminist dynamics, focusing on improving the quality of life of citizens (users and residents); promoting better urban planning strategies; and constructing public policies to encourage inclusion, respect, diversity and tolerance.

Finally, the case study has shown how the latest expressions of femicide violence in the city of Cuenca (Ecuador) have led to a renewed logic of spatial and heritage appropriation by local collectives. With this in mind, gender mainstreaming and intersectionality in contemporary society raise questions regarding current understandings, values and conservation practices. Furthermore, it promotes dialogue about women's historical role in this process and how cultural heritage assets are being redefined.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In the year 2020, 4 violent femicides were registered in Azuay, which increased to 16 in the year 2021, revealing an unprecedented escalation in intimate partner and intrafamily violence.
- <sup>2</sup> The initiative was led by the organization Cabildo Mujeres of the Cuenca canton. It was considered through regular proceedings before the Commission for Historical and Heritage Areas of the Autonomous Decentralized Municipal Government of Cuenca in ordinary session No. 33 of 2020. The petition included the execution of various artistic expressions [92], which were approved [47], unlike the name change.

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