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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7759k9t4>

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Publication Date

2006-03-31

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Key Words:

Globalization, local governance, sustainability, urban design, and urban development

Abstract:

Since 1988, when the mayoral office of Bogotá, Colombia changed from an appointed to an elected position, the city and its politicians have struggled to balance the demands of politics, culture, and urban planning and design. In this time, Bogotá has undergone a physical and perceptual transformation, becoming a model of sustainable urban development (SUD). While the dramatic shifts in development vision that occur with each new mayor have created a different set of city priorities every 3-4 years, a new set of public urban spaces has emerged in the city through the larger process of change.

Introduction:

The world's environmental sustainability and quality of life depends to a large extent on what is done during the next few years in the Third World's 22 mega-cities. There is still time to think different... there could be cities with as much public space for children as for cars, with a backbone of pedestrian streets, sidewalks and parks, supported by public transport.¹ Enrique Peñalosa, Mayor of Bogotá, 1998-2000.

Enrique Peñalosa was a mayor who believed that the key to quality of life for Bogotá's lay in equally dispersing social goods throughout the population; what was unique, was his focus on providing public open space as an answer to inequality – a remedy for socio-economic segregation and the limited ability of the poor to find natural and enjoyable recreation areas. This drive spearheaded the creation of new types of open space in Bogotá that has occupied the city since 1995. In Bogotá, political changes stem from 1988, when the mayor's office changed from an appointed to an elected position. Previously, the average mayoral administration lasted an average of nine months. With the change to elections, mayors were in office for three years at a time and could run for re-election. This coincided with a push to develop a culture of citizenship, rather than a culture of the individual, as well as the select selling off of certain public utility services, creating an influx of cash. The result has been the development of physical infrastructure projects and increased social programs. Since 1995, in particular, there has been a strong focus on creating social and physical changes in the city. Bogotá's SUD vision focuses on improving social relations, environmental systems, and the physical fabric of the city. While the balance between these elements varies by administration, a distinct set of new public spaces has emerged through the process.

¹ Peñalosa, "Biography," Fundacion por el pais que Queremos.

SUD has been defined locally in somewhat competing ways. For Peñalosa (1998-2000) it was about the equal dispersal of goods and services throughout all neighborhoods and focused on public transport and public open spaces. His definition is by far the most experiential: “The importance of pedestrian public spaces cannot be measured, but most other important things in life cannot be measured either: friendship, beauty, love and loyalty are examples. Parks and other pedestrian places are essential to a city’s happiness.”² When Antanas Mockus was the mayor (1995-97), he focused on building cultural capital by promoting better social relations. In his second administration (2001-03) he used “sustainable and inclusive urban development” to describe a vision of transportation alternatives, improved health, protected natural and scenic resources, and plentiful public spaces. The current mayor, Lucho Garzón (2004-07), has dismissed much of the work previous to him as “maquillaje,” or makeup, he is focusing on issues like milk and food programs, hiring more teachers, and sending more kids to school.

While I originally believed that these different “takes” on sustainability were at war with one another, with further field research I am coming to understand that there is a potent unifying force in Bogota right now, an attitude of “Bogotantud” that is very positive and almost unstoppable, so while each mayor is contributing in different ways to changing and improving the city, none could likely derail or even strongly turn this process of change to meet only their own goals. So in essence, most SUD definitions agree on a long-term view, agreement on some form of balance between economic, environmental and social needs, and the inclusion of quality of life as an issue.³ The different mayoral administrations can be viewed as emphasizing different facets of this vision, for Penalosa – the built environment, Mockus – cultural capital and social relationships, and Garzón – basic necessities for improving quality of life.

The SUD model that is emerging in Bogota includes the strong hubs of infrastructure, economy, and cultural life. In the future another hub “social” will be added to these three, which represents certain aspects of quality of life: lack of hunger, education, and health. (Image of this theoretical model will be presented at the conference). Sorely lacking from this model are environmental concerns, while limited planning around ecological systems and environmental health has occurred, it is represented primarily in a single planning document that the current mayoral administration has no interest in.

Emerging Spaces in the Search for a New Identity:

Bogotá is officially a city of 7-8 million, depending on which expert you talk to. Because forty percent of its land area is occupied by squatter settlements, and some people moving in to the city from rural areas make due by living on the streets and under highway overpasses, it is easy to miscount the city’s population. It is “landlocked” between mountains and guerilla fighters to the east and the Bogotá River to the west; and development is pushing out to the north and the south. The population is growing at 3 percent/year, but has experienced highs of 7 percent/year. Bogotá employs SUD as an umbrella concept for coping creatively with rapid growth and the growing needs and desires of its residents. Many of the experimental projects have focused on public open spaces,

² Ibid.

³ Mawhinney.

which are complicated by conflicting interests between where the city should focus its attentions – be attractive to the outside world and/or be effective for residents. There are nine new types of public spaces.

1. The Reclaimed Urban Plaza

San Victorino Plaza is one of the oldest public spaces in the city. Originally created around 1650, the district was an elegant residential zone well into the 20th century. However, late in that century, the plaza became a center for street vending.

Figure 1: Plaza San Victorino Before

In 2000, a project created by the Public Space Workshop “El Taller de Espacio Publico” a joint project between the City, a Madrid-based design firm, and the United Nations transformed the plaza once again into an urban open space that included new elements: a sculpture by the famous Colombian artist Édgar Negret, an ornamental fountain, and trees, creating a space in which one could again “appreciate the colonial and republican architecture surrounding the plaza.”⁴

Figure 2: Plaza San Victorino After

Peñalosa desired a different use and appearance, the fact that it is one that fits well on the cover of a design magazine may be a side note, or maybe not. Citing illegal activity and the use of public space to make private profit, he ordered the market closed. His goal was to resurrect the plaza to a higher cultural plane. I believe that a majority of the residents were supportive of this change. In interviews people have described the market as “chaotic,” “dirty,” and “unnavigable”. However, Peñalosa had a very narrow vision of the possibilities for the plaza which excluded incorporating vendors into the process and creating a democratic 21st-century open space, the design strongly dictates how this urban plaza ought to be used. In minor forms of transgression, and to get a better view, most people sit on top of the seating walls and put their feet on the actual benches.

Figure 3: Vendors and sitters in Plaza San Victorino

In 2004, a survey of residents citywide showed that 61 percent of people buy from informal vendors, continuing a local process that was most strongly present in San Victorino in the late 20th century. Today the Plaza has a dual identity as a historical space invoked to promote a new and focused global future and as everyday open space in which vendors still tread, but carefully.

2. Prestige Park

The Parque Tercer Milenio is either a bankrupting vanity project, or a major improvement to the city, depending with whom you speak. The United States’s Urban Land Institute reported (in what year?) that a major downtown area with significantly dilapidated housing was cleared to create space for this 16-hectare urban park.⁵ By most reports, this project was a pet project for Peñalosa. His planning policy described it as the most ambitious urban

⁴ Villegas, 199.

⁵ Berens, 90.

redevelopment project in the city's history, with a goal to redevelop that notorious *Calle de Cartucho*, a lower income neighborhood "whose decay fed the progressive deterioration of the historic center."⁶

Figure 3: *Calle de Cartucho*

Figure 4: *Parque Tercer Milenio*

An associated plan to land bank properties around the project and offer them for redevelopment fell apart, due to lack of funds and organization. The park project itself ran over budget, and the nearly complete project sat closed for months until finally opening in August of 2005. With few people living in the surrounding area, there are limited park visitors. A former city council aide who works at the edge of the park said that hundreds of thousands of people flow through the center of the city during the day, but at night it is uninhabited. He believes that the city lacks a vision for how to provide incentives for use of the park. Motorcycle police have used the park as a training area, further deterring visitors. Now, visitors are slowly starting to use the park. It is a grand gesture in the center of the city, one that appears premature, in light of the lack of unified vision and funding for how to redevelop the surroundings to include housing and a commercial center. To make good on this enormous investment, city would need to redevelop the center to accommodate and draw residents, and to work with residents of the neighboring *Calle de Cartucho* to provide needed social services. As it stands now, the park is an expensive and unused testament to Peñalosa's vanity, and to the thousands of people displaced to accommodate it.

3. Public facilities

A few significant types of capital improvement projects have been focused on in the last couple of administrations: libraries, schools, and an archive. (Need to fill in).

4. Ciclorutas

The *cicloruta* (bicycle path) system is an essential component of the city's new model of transportation. It is a network of lanes linking homes, workplaces, and public spaces. The first route was designed and implemented during Mockus' first administration; the current 80-kilometer system was completed during Peñalosa's. Bicycles are used for 3-4 percent of trips.⁷ Mockus hoped to steadily raise this to 30 percent and described this as a "change [that] would place daily life on a different cultural level."⁸

Figure 5: *A cicloruta under construction*

Critics say that the *ciclorutas* were installed without sufficient study. One problem is that the *ciclorutas* run on the sidewalk at the same level, rather than adjacent to the street. Pedestrians, still unused to or indifferent to the lanes, regularly walk in and across them. This is especially a problem along popular avenues where people must cross the bike lanes to board buses. Also, where driveways have been shortened to add a bike path along residential sidewalks, exiting cars cannot see cyclists until the car is in the path. Concerns about personal and bike storage security issues have curtailed some use. One highly-placed architect from Mockus' second administration (2001-03) said that the "TransMilenio" effect

⁶ Peñalosa, Fundación por el País que Queremos.

⁷ Add cite from Mobility Master Plan

⁸ Mockus, *Para Vivir - Perspectivas* 1, 42

-- better civic behavior in response to new means of transport -- is wearing off, and crime is back up on the buses and along the *ciclorutas*. The sense right now is that things are more unsafe than they seem and, in a way, the urban design might do a disservice here by promoting a well-ordered and safe image. However, while not perfect, the *cicloruta* system has been wedged into the existing urban fabric in, perhaps, the best manner possible and is still safer than the previous habit of riding in the street with the cars. Also of note is the popularity of the *ciclovia* routes – streets on Sundays from morning to afternoon that are car-free to allow people to cycle safely.

5. Shopping streets and districts

In the 1990s and earlier in Bogotá, the person with the car ruled the city. Cars were parked everywhere, especially on sidewalks. With the push towards a culture of citizenship (1995-97), and campaign to curb the car (1998-2000), the use and appearance of sidewalks dramatically changed. Bollards, trees, and additional width were added and cars were prohibited. As a result, traditional shopping areas in Bogotá began to change. Many merchants expressed fears that without the informal parking that sidewalks provided and with the obscuring cover of trees they would lose customers. Certain shopping streets have died but other, new zones are flourishing, people are leaving their cars in garages and using the city.

Figure 6A&B: Sidewalk design

6. Urban river

The historic Avenida Jimenez was remodeled starting in 1997 to become a well-lit pedestrian promenade with trees and a linear, cascading channel of water fed by the daylighted San Francisco River. Designed by Rogelio Salmona and Luis Kopec, both architects with world-class reputations, this project was conceived of as the widest pedestrian sidewalk in the world. It connects several different neighborhoods, allowing many different kinds of people to interact in a comfortable public space.

Figure 7: View of Avenida Jimenez

Figure 8: Avenida Jimenez

7. Local parks

The zonal planning scale, consisting of a handful of neighborhoods, is somewhat ignored in Bogotá. However, there is a strong system of neighborhood green spaces, which often include sports courts and/or a nearby commercial center. Many of these spaces had become unused and dangerous during the second half of the 20th century, but since 1995 many have been renovated, sometimes by the residents themselves, and new ones built.

Figure 9A&B: Local park

8. Bus platforms and system

The TransMilenio bus system is an expanding network of center-of-the-road rapid transit lanes and prepay bus platforms fed at key points by pedestrian bridges that connect to sidewalks. Designed and built in less than three years during Peñalosa's administration, it has continued to expand through Mockus' and now Garzón's administrations. Originally inspired by the system in Curitiba, Bogotá's system is far more linear, running north-south, with small arms reaching west, in contrast to Curitiba's star-shaped system.

Figure 10: TransMilenio station

Critiques of the system say that this enormous investment has not created the desired urban renewal. While the system is deservedly a success, it could have been helped by purchasing more land on either side of the corridor and redeveloping buildings to serve and support the transit corridors. In reality, it has created a series of leftover spaces that do not fit norms and cannot legally be developed. However, some property owners have bribed officials for development rights and are building “Mickey-Mouse” buildings of 20-30 foot depth along the bus lines; in other places the city is creating open spaces out of the leftovers. Several people have pointed out that the process was too rapid and led to a half-planned system. Despite the problems, the system continues to expand to meet demands for rapid transit to and from the center. By 2009, the system which reach the end of its planning and funding cycle and is predicted to have the ability to carry about 25 percent of the demand for rapid-transit trips in Bogotá.⁹

Figure 11: Leftover space

9. Hybrid spaces

Where appropriate, basic infrastructure projects are coupled with public space urban design projects. In the Patio Bonito neighborhood, the city’s water system is being extended down one of the main streets. On top of the large pipes an elevated public walkway with trees is being installed, forcing traffic lanes to either side. A very practical solution to adding open space, this project allows people to step up out of the mud of the traffic lanes and more easily walk to other locations, including bus stops.

Figure 12: Patio Bonito

Issues in Bogotá’s Model of Sustainable Urban Development:

The political leadership is experimenting with projects to improve quality of life. However, the short mayoral terms and Bogotá’s position as the nation’s capital have led to a tug of war over personal projects and, to hurried and inadequately planned capital improvement projects and in-fighting between successive mayors as each one positions themselves in alignment with or against their predecessor. This has led to rapidly shifting priorities in city development. These multiple, competing projects subvert the stated vision of the city and create a split ideal: those focused in creating a better city for the citizens and those trying to shape an attractive and desirable city for a global audience. There is a local versus expert debate, similar to what Appleyard and Peattie wrote about in Ciudad Guayana. Perhaps Bogota’s best political leaders must function in both roles. They must focus on the “inside view” to provide residents with what they truly need and want, but also understand what makes Bogotá attractive and competitive with other cities.

Inwardly versus outwardly focused identity - locally and globally-focused identities within Bogotá come into alignment and conflict through Bogotá’s city (re)making process. Open-ended interviews have indicated that the more global identity oriented the space, the less

⁹ Cite Winston Gonzalez’s El Tiempo article

people are satisfied with it (prestige park, reclaimed urban plaza), the more local identity oriented the space, the more satisfied people are with it (local parks, bicycle paths, etc).

Evolution versus imposition of new spaces - new types of urban spaces have been created in the city. There are significant spatial conflicts where the new types of spaces are not culturally based. The two best examples are the continuation of vending in the Plaza San Victorino and continued conflicts on the *ciclorutas*.

Physical improvements versus social programs – Open-ended interviews indicate that awareness, use of, and satisfaction with the urban open spaces vary significantly between people of different socio-economic levels. The richer support the physical investments, the poorer, the social investments.

Conclusion:

This paper describes a new set of public urban spaces taking shape through Bogotá's SUD process. These spaces are shaped by local cultural and political struggles, including the rush to plan and implement complete projects top-down within single mayoral administrations and tensions between local versus global identity makers. It's quite possible that SUD in Bogota is partially alternative vision, partially branding strategy for the city.

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