



e² design “Bogotá: Building a Sustainable City”

Background Essay

As few as 10 years ago Bogotá, Colombia was characterized by drug cartels, senseless violence and a 30-year civil war. Every three hours someone was kidnapped. Every 15 minutes someone was murdered. At one point there was not an upper- or middle-class Colombian family that did not know somebody who had been abducted.

Today as you move around the city you'll see mega-libraries, greenways, 1,000 parks, over 70,000 trees and a state-of-the art transportation system called the TransMilenio, meaning “transcending the millennium”. The TransMilenio is an alternative to the chaotic, independently operated bus service that dominated the city in the past. Along with this infrastructure, you'll see people from all walks of life out of their cars, enjoying their city space- parents strolling with their kids, co-workers eating lunch outside, neighbors meeting and talking with one another.

How did this remarkable transition happen to the city of Bogotá? It came out of the vision that Enrique Peñalosa, Mayor of Bogotá from 1997 through 2000, had for his city. He wanted to reverse the decades-long norm of poverty, drug cartels and violence and make citizens proud of the metropolis in which they lived. Peñalosa believed that cities should encourage walking and biking, which would in turn promote community and make the streets safer for children. With these ideas in mind he reformed public transportation, added greenways, built mega-libraries and created the longest stretch of bike-only lanes in the world. Peñalosa's commitment to getting people out of their cars even led to a program called the “pico y placa” (“peak times and license plates”) that greatly restricts the use of private automobiles at peak times.

This episode highlights the story of how one man's vision transformed one of the most chaotic cities in the world into a shining model of urban planning, community development and public transportation. Although by his own admission there is more work to be done, the transformation that has taken place thus far is remarkable and has been lauded as an example for the world to follow.

For more information about Enrique Peñalosa, visit www.planning.org/enfant/aboutpenalosa.htm



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PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

1. What types of public spaces exist in your town (e.g., bike paths, parks, public transportation)? Are they being used? If so, by who primarily? Are they safe? Clean?
 2. What issues do designers need to address when thinking about urban planning? Where do interest groups and policy makers come into the picture? What challenges and influences do they have on urban planning designers?
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POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS

1. How did the reforms made by Peñalosa unite the poorer and more affluent citizens of Bogotá?
2. What risks did Peñalosa take in regards to public interest and policy?
3. What was the link Peñalosa made between creating walking and biking lanes and fighting violence?
4. Do you think your community and policy makers would be happy to build more walking and biking lanes in your town/city? Do you think they would invite policies to regulate cars on certain streets during certain times? Why?