

BOGOTÁ REGION

Planning theories vs. urban practices



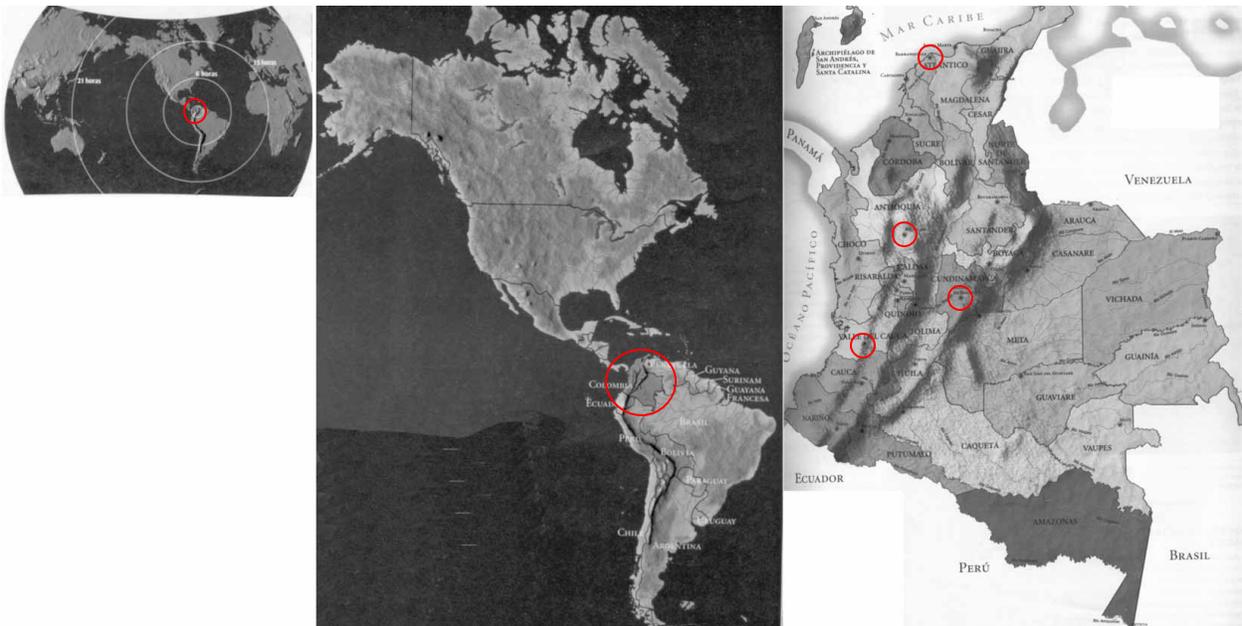
Colombia is trying to bring up to date on urbanistic practices; in the last seven years professionals and politicians are starting a change on the way of facing the development of the cities, trying to find a model and a guide for the process itself. It's been a long way and there is a lot to examine, that is why this is the time for new ideas to find the kind of methods and concepts for the present and the future.

To understand the challenges to which Colombian urban planners and politicians have faced in the search for a solution to urban problems, above all the social un-equality, is necessary to have a look on the development of Bogotá through the last 50 years of the 20th century. In order to accomplish this, the paper is structured in two parts; in the first one is explained the growth of Bogotá until the present form, analyzing the economic and social changes which conducted the city's urban transformation. The second part is about the way of the 2003's Plan for the development of Bogotá; here is analyzed the Plan through its socio-economic and spatial structure in order to comprehend the regional model proposed by it and in this way remark the contradictions founded between what is planned and what the urban reality described before is about.

Bogotá is the economic and administrative capital of Colombia, located almost in the geographical center of the country, on a plain in the middle of the Andes, with a population that reaches the **8 million inhabitants** and an extension that would be equalized to the territory of Israel. Bogotá is a new, dense, large city and not much planned; is a city of **multiple faces**, where the formal and the informal are mixed, a difficult, complex, poor, modern city to understand and to administer.



From the 1960's, the concentration of population in Bogotá begins to be greater than that in other big cities of the country; this phenomenon, that conducts to the supremacy of Bogotá over other important cities as Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla, is more evident in recent years. What makes this greater congregation of people to take place is mainly because of economic and social factors, like a greater participation in the Colombian exterior commerce, a strengthening of the central government which is located here, and the enlargement of the local market. The fact of Bogotá' supremacy – as a way to confirm its function of capital of the country, and its growing role in the national industry –, is found deeply studied by Vicent Gouëset. In his book, Gouëset exposes that the processes of industrialization and *tertiarization* in Colombia were produced almost at the same time, coinciding with the accelerated urbanisation and the urban concentration in Bogotá.



Starting from Bogotá's supremacy over the rest of the national territory, the phenomenon of its accelerated, formal and informal, legal and illegal, planned and spontaneous growth is explained.

Territorial occupation

In the first 30 years of the 20th century, the population of Bogotá trebled while the urbanized extension enlarged 8 times. From the 1940's this situation has been inverted; the population has multiplied for 20 while the urbanized area has only enlarged its size 12 times.

Since the end of the 1940's, people seeking work, education and dwelling opportunities were launched to the conquest of Bogotá. In the mid 1950's the migrations because of violence and insecurity, in the countryside and other provinces, enlarged the settlers of the city. Bogotá was neither prepared for that kind of human avalanche, nor offered opportunities for all the ones that sought them. This then generated the first poverty belts, settlements in the outskirts developed by new residents whom were trying to take part of what the city offered but was not enough for everyone. By this time, the first "pirate" urbanisations arose, created by those who wanted to take advantage of the new-comers selling low prices land – that could not compete with the real values of the market – with no infrastructure at all.

In this way began the expansion of Bogotá all along the territory, a growth that has not found physical limits; this development is called **urban explosion** in the study done by the *Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico* – CEDE of the University of the Andes. This growth has been described as an “oil stain” due to the large amounts of land swallowed up and uncritical perpetuation of the forms of the existing city, and an interurban continuum became established; economic activities and residential zones have occupied territory out of the administrative limits of the city. The development reached neighboring towns and some large empty spaces were left at the core of Bogotá.

The urban expansion has not been physically continuous, functional pieces were created with no connection between each other; some of these fragments are purely economic districts while others residential zones. To the south were located mainly large residential areas of low income, and to the north were residential and leisure zones of greater income; to the west diverse activities were situated, especially industries of low impact and average class dwelling urbanisations. It has to be emphasized the importance that has always had the traditional core as a favored place for the establishment of economic activities and for the concentration of private and public offices.

Urban planning

The explosive growth of Bogotá coincided with the first urban plans; at the same time when town planners and government were trying to create an order for the existing city and to establish options for the future, the immigrants began to develop large spontaneous settlements. It is also clear that the first plans contributed the physical fragmentation of the city, since their principal objective was to design small urban portions which in fact were not connected to the entire city, which were not consistent at all. Alberto Saldarriaga divides the history of the urban planning in Bogotá into 4 stages: - expansion planning, between 1923 and 1944, where mainly the existing urban plot is prolonged, drawing packages of growth with specific activities and a properly established architectural design. - modern planning, such as the Plan Piloto presented by Le Corbusier in 1951, that basically was the definition of zoning criteria for the city and the adaptation of the existing road system; almost all of these kind of plans were not very popular and were never adopted entirely by the government. - planning as supporter of the financial and real estate action, in the last 30 years of the 20th century; these plans contributed to particular interests and free market in order to direct the development of the city. They were about building types for residential areas and architectonic studies on specific places of the city; no general concept was conceived. - the 1997's “Territorial Planning Law” which proposes a new way of planning for the entire country and is the departure point for the urban development theory developed for present Bogotá.

In each urban plan for Bogotá has been practiced somewhat different; this instability and the short operation of every planning schedule, have converted the plans into weak instruments. As explained by Saldarriaga, the mayors' short periods of government and their desires for the imposition of their own proposals, annulling the previous ones, have resulted in the end of the credibility for these instruments.

Internal transformations

Since 1985, the armed conflict suffered in Colombia has displaced the population of other towns towards the capital of the country, enlarging the number of inhabitants that struggles to survive. The city's internal structure has been transformed due to the end of the urban expansion and the occupation of the empty spaces left by the prior explosion; this phenomenon began for different causes, among them the big size reached by the city, the absence of an adequate road system and an efficient collective transportation structure, the increase on land prices, and the building bylaws that privileged densification. This process, still under way, has been called **urban implosion** by the CEDE.

The population has increased specially on the city's boundaries and at the same time there is a evident densification process, mainly of residential activity, in central areas of the city. Bogotá internal transformation has meant also a strong change on the stable centrality of the traditional core as a locating site of the employment forces and of the principal economic activities that took place in the city; nowadays this core is an expanded center which has taken the main infrastructure as the axle for the distribution of public and private offices, cultural and commercial activities, connecting the traditional core with the cores of the neighbouring towns which now are part of the entire city structure.

Simultaneously, the unifamiliar dwellings in low density have been changed for multifamiliar in middle density; this transition has been produced replacing one or two floor constructions for high buildings, and changing residential activities for commercial and office activities. Structure and activity substitution has not produced the enlargement of the road and public utility infrastructures, generating a considerable deficiency in the quality of the built space; the conditions for the necessary networks' endowments and enlargements were not determined by the building bylaws which supported the city densification, thereby generating low value sectors and an exaggerated fragments' congestion.

Informal urbanisation

In Bogotá are two different ways to construct the city, a spontaneous one and a planned one which differ from each other both formal and functionally; a city that adjusts to the economic, social and standard representative ambits of the country, while the other one does not. The "planning product" is known as the **formal city**; what does not adjust closely to those parameters is the popular city, the spontaneous one, the **informal city**.

Nearly the 50% of the urban built space in Bogotá is the result of informal development. Clandestine settlements are distinguished by the illegal occupation of land and by the indefinite duration of the dwelling construction, being considerable distinct from the way of developing the "formal city"; there are as well pirate urbanizers whom sell plots of ground at very low prices in areas where there are neither infrastructures nor roads.

The growth of those new neighborhoods has a direct relation with the fast increase of the population, above all because of rural immigrants. The increase in the residential areas of the city is also due to the popular assesment of "one's own" dwelling, being more important to guarantee the future of the family under any roof, in a invaded or illegally acquired land, than to have the comfort that a good house or neighborhood may offer. This comfort is acquired after many years, inclusive through generations, of efforts and investments from the new inhabitants of the city.

The illegal neighborhoods lack the minimum qualities of life, with precarious dwellings and no kind of public services (basics, equipments or roads). Those type of neighborhoods constitute the more dynamic way of expansion of the city, although some sectors are rapidly transforming into consolidated neighborhoods. Moreover, those developments occupy land risk areas and every time move away more from the central zones where the major commercial and employment activities are located.

Present form and structure

The territory has not been urbanized as it has been occupied, the city has grown and spread through the environment composing a **urban geography with discontinuities**, where big built spaces mix up with large empty spaces, where crowded – activities and buildings – areas coexist with other obsolete or abandoned ones. This kind of land occupation has produced a fragmented urban form, a heterogeneous morphologic city amongst its urban pieces, a city which spreads beyond its official boundaries, but a dense and compact city.



This urban form is also fruit of Bogotá **duality**: a formal city and an informal city; a modern part capable of competing with big world metropolis, and a informal part that does not share the space order or the labor market of the first one. There are combinations and gradations of this two cities the length and breadth of Bogotá, of this two complete opposites, forming a divided landscape that town planners, politicians and citizens perceive dependig on their own contexts, experiences and realities.

Changes on building forms and urban uses, without an improvement on road and service infrastructures (including equipments), have developed an unbalanced city, with a powerful residential fabric but without complementary activities, with areas where the labor supply is poor and others where is excessive. The lack of relation between urban pieces, between existent uses in the city, make the internal mobility to exceed the limits of its supply, roads and public transportation do not fulfill the inhabitant needs. A resident living in the south of Bogotá who has to go to his work at the north of the city, takes about one or two hours to cross the capital because of the city extension and of the connection network.

The built city has been renovated once and again to solve unexpected realities. In the last years of the 20th century, urban planning has been concerned with the “incorporation to the progress of groups remaining on the sidelines of the estate laws” (Tovar, 2000, 30); in other words, in time to migration and illegal territory occupation, the government has integrated this new informal sector of society to the formal city through road and public service extension. Meanwhile, the building regulations have created the formal city that is growing thanks to the real estate freedom, which in fact allows the “property by property” development without a general idea as a whole, without clear growing guidelines, without complementing the parts. The really important

issue in this type of development is builders and land owners getting rich with the *excuse* of the emergency of dwelling for the city's million inhabitants.

This *resulting* urban geographic has **new centers** developed by the causes explained: urban explosion, implosion and informality. Business, institutional and *tertiary* activities have situated on new places such as the bordering town centers (that are now part of one unique city) and other places which did not use to have the attributes as a center but that have emerged because of accumulated factors (universities' location or new industries...). The traditional central core is specialized on educational and popular commerce activities ending with the multifunctionality that used to exist; the new centralities are located to the north and to the west of Bogotá. Those centralities emphasize the city fragmentation even if work and housing activities continue to exceed the new "not-clear" boundaries.



Present challenges

The present urban configuration of Bogotá as a multiple, diverse and heterogeneous city demands that policies and practices act in response to this reality.

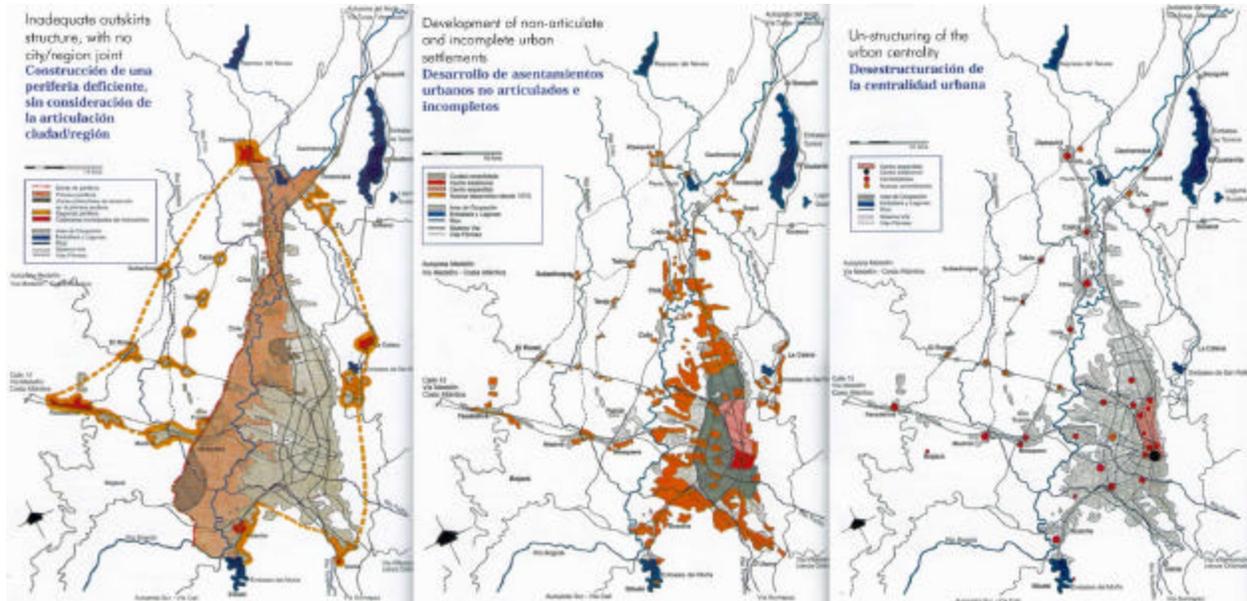
The contemporary planning has confronted old challenges present for long time in Bogotá. Amongst its concerns, besides the previously related urban situation and structure, are as follows:

Protection to the environment; land planning; structuring a collective transport system; development of an equipment network; completing basic public services; consolidation of new centralities and creation of new ones; social dwelling solutions.

The *Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial* – POT (Plan for Territorial Organization) was approved in 2000 and in 2003 its central concept was modified, the **city model**, in order to adjust it to the reality. The POT, in a way, seeks for a cleansing of the chain of political favours and corruption by means of clear plan and regulations; the POT seeks for the plan execution beyond Mayor's periods (elected for 3 years without the possibility of being consecutively re-elected); the POT seeks to clarify the meaning of town planning in the country; the POT seeks a city model: the **Bogotá region**.

This "region" structure does not obey neither to previous planning nor to agreements between bordering towns but it is the spontaneous urban growth and development result; the urban nuclei that formed the city are located physically continuous and the relations of mobility for work and study are too intense. The region is assumed as a whole that relates to the district, the country and the world, and the patterns and strategies are given to strengthen these connections.

For many years, Bogotá's town planning dedicated to organized existent and future buildings, leaving aside the adoption of a city model which included a growing form and a consolidating form, a physical form as well as an economic and social one. The POT pretends to fill this gap establishing a way for making the city through the determination of a regional system – a network of cities – from the relation in existence.

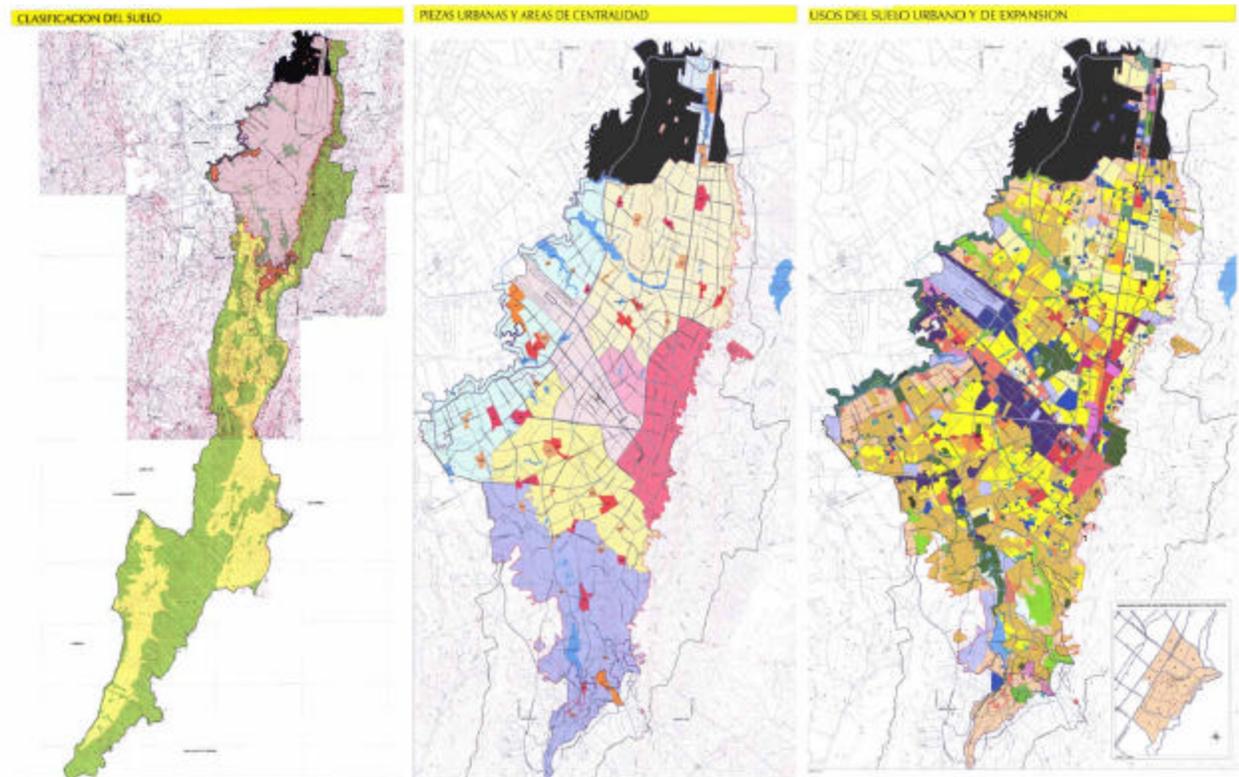


Starting from the present urban structure, the POT claims to:

- **Planning the region based on a long term horizon:** taking into account the duty of a sustainable development (ambientally, socially and economically) to act in accordance with the territorial policies in Colombia, is necessary to determine the operations to carry out in the next 9 years and the theme priorities that each Mayor has to respect and execute.
- **Planning the territory based on an open model:** to recognize the territory as a network of cities that articulate physically and virtually among them and with the national and international landscapes. This model emphasizes the long term planning condition enunciated previously.
- **Controlling urban expansion processes:** this control is made to contain the *conurbation* processes. The POT proposes to efficiently use the land for growing areas and for consolidated areas, so to attenuate urbanistic pressures on rural land and on the ecological structure that supports Bogotá.
- **Developing a diversified city-region model, with a specialized center on services:** it is essential to guarantee an open and competitive city consolidating the goods and services supply by making use of existent agglomeration advantages, of the economical conditions of the different parts that form the region, and of the strategic location of Bogotá in the national and latinamerican contexts.
- **Recognizing inter-dependence of urban and rural activities throughout the region:** this is an attempt to promote actions to integrate the environment with the human settlements, road structure and complementary services.
- **Developing strategic tools:** to strengthen public institutions and to decentralize governmental competencies.
- **Encouraging social balance and equality:** adopting policies to reduce poverty, spatial segregation and population inequality; the POT encourages social cohesion, public

investment, developing of social dwelling projects, equipment endowment... general improvement on the opportunities for all the region's inhabitants.

In order to carry out the considered objectives, the POT defines expansion areas and land uses according to equipment and housing demands – taking into account the existent uses and the previous plan studies, the environmental protection and recuperation of the hills and rivers that make up the city, and the existent urban areas consolidation all over the region.



The plan defines the consolidation of the 3 structures that compose the region as a strategy to develop the policies established previously. These structures are: the ecological one (natural elements), the socio-economical and spatial one (physical development of the economic and service activities), and the functional services (road network, equipments, open spaces, public utilities). The **structure** to discuss in this case is the **socio-economic and spatial** because it is about the urban organization and its management.

Regional space

In order to determine the physical regional planning, the POT introduces a model which articulates physical and virtually each part of the network, consolidating strengths and improving deficiencies – the region. There is a logic for the location of functions in the city, a logic that produces **activity nodes** that dominate the setting of inhabitants in the region. The plan has a study that identifies these nodes, their distribution on the space, the part they play in the regional system, and their classification by level of centrality. This level is measured by: employment dynamics, land prizes, assets's concentration, destinies in citizens' mobility, and the location of community equipments. In this way, there are shown 19 centralities, with diverse characteristics, which are the basis for the structure of the region's fragments and thus establish the needs for public services and employment, and to promote social cohesion along the city.

The projects formulated by the plan are based on the equality between the centralities, looking for alternatives to change the absence of economic and service concentration in those areas where are lacking – according to the characteristics listed above. There are 3 areas without nodal points which are located to the south – where the informal urbanisation is the law – and to the west – urban explosion – that do not used to be part of Bogotá but that are now part of the region.

Each centrality has its own guidelines to its development; these lines determine the consolidation of the centrality and its strategic function inside the region, but always from the point of view of the regional, national and international integration. In every area are marked out operations for the mobility system, urban equipment, open spaces and public utilities; the maintenance, renovation or construction of elements for these systems are considered. Besides, the new expansion zones and the housing and commerce renovation areas are indicated on the plan, in order to consolidate the proposed centralities.

There is very important to state that the idea of a **multiple** city is a conceptual part of the plan for Bogotá. Both difference and **diversity** as parts of the urban society and space are key factors for the planned development of the city. This diversity is a product of the city's accelerated growth which is at the same time product of the strong immigrations. The model that justifies the POT looks for an homogeneous order reducing this diversity – a fundamental quality of the Bogotá region.

Planning theories

It has to be said that we are willing to learn, that we have little experience on putting town planning *to produce* what we want for the city but that we are trying to make an approach to the challenge: the good development of our city. From the beginning of the 20th century urban planners in Bogotá are trying to find a model in which services and facilities are equal and accesible to anyone anywhere; the new POT seeks for the urban social equality in this way, but it is still a concept because in the practice is very different.

Equality is the “equal” recognition of the citizen's rights, whom at the same time have different needs, interests and values. Treating everyone in the same way maintains existent un-equalities.

The POT considers to restate the city's development as a complex regional system connected to the country and the world. In the other hand, that regional system will allow to create new centralities for the improvement of the quality of life of the citizens by the desconcentration of economical opportunities. This is how the plan will obtain a **homogeneous city**, where each urban piece is important as itself, not as part of a whole.

The POT's idea to create the same opportunities for all is an elemental objective in urban planning and in any political agenda anywhere in the world. The problem arises when the concept is to homogenize the fragments instead of improving the relations between them – between the urban pieces –with the objective of **space equality**: the equality of opportunities but not the formal equality, not the creation of new identical centralities, but a **space equilibrium**.

The new Plan constitutes centrality nodes according to every Bogotá zone needs in order to solve the lack or low presence of economic and service activities. This approach would break the already existent heterogeneous structure rather than to get better the present situation. A

coherent approach would be to connect and relate physical, formal and virtually all urban pieces, consolidating the structure by strengthening links, by infrastructure, by the very same social relations.

The formal and functional uniformity proposed will break – as said just above – Bogotá's structure leaving **urban islands with no connection between them** as independent pieces that would compete against each other. This independence is not sustainable because there will be incommunicated city's portions and the initial concept will be broken: the consolidation of a system.

Bogotá's vision as regional system would have to be implemented even to the interior parts, articulating the region inside and outside, structuring the units which form the network in the regional, national and world scales. It is important to connect the city to the world without forgetting about the pieces that constitute its real and present situation, its cultural, functional and *formal diversity*. Before starting the reinforcement of the centralities as the structure's organizing pieces for the making of the Bogotá-region, the joint of the internal structure has to be done. If the system's parts get strong first, the city's framework will weaken. In this way the present Bogotá's urban character – its fragmented/formal/informal constitution – is changed; the physical, functional and cultural form has to be the departure point for the development of a regional model appropriate to the reality and at the same time practical.



The study for the needs of each centrality did not include the city's diversity. This study is focused on a part of the society, on the needs of and the way of a part of Bogotá's society. Policies should reconcile structures and practices, go beyond the simple fact of helping the *disadvantaged*.

Urban practices

There is a tendency to marginalize the social and community sides in the town planning process, privileging the physical and technical sides. In Colombia, the traditional boundaries between academic disciplines are not yet broken, as in other countries, and town planning is an exclusive *theme* for architects, engineers and economists; there are few sociologists, philosophers and artists interested on the city.

This is the first time that politicians and professionals address efforts to *think* the city and its future, but there is a dangerous lack of communication channels between citizens and urban planners. The development of the Bogotá's POT has been obstaculized because of citizens' lack of knowledge about the plan itself. **Citizens' low participation level** on the previous studies and on the final composition of the plan, and the lack of a clear **institutional policy** that difuses the law that regulates the plan, assume a conceptual void in Bogotá's model. In other

words, the actors that have to execute the designed POT programs do not know the real meaning of town planning nor the way to carry out the projects.

The management of the city is not complete.

The urban region is limited to a physical continuous space.

The *region* concept is not enough to hold Bogotá's reality.

Bibliographic references

- Centro de Estudios de Desarrollo Económico CEDE of the University of the Andes (1998) *Bogotá – Sabana un territorio posible*. Bogotá: Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá
- Gouëset, Vincent (1998) *Bogotá: nacimiento de una metrópoli*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo editores
- Qadeer, Mohammad (1997) "Pluralistic planning for multicultural cities: The Canadian practice", *Journal of the American Planning Association*, No. 63
- Saldarriaga Roa, Alberto (2000) *Bogotá siglo XX urbanismo, arquitectura y vida urbana*. Bogotá: Departamento Administrativo de Planeación Distrital
- Thompson, Susan (2000) Diversity, Difference and the Multi-Layered City, in Freestone, Robert *Urban Planning in a Changing World*. London: E&F Spon
- Tovar Pinzón, Hermes (2000) De la esperanza a la incertidumbre en la historia de Colombia del siglo XX, in Gutiérrez, Jorge (ed.) *Cien años de arquitectura en Colombia, XVII Bienal de Arquitectura 2000*. Bogotá: Sociedad Colombiana de Arquitectos

Photo sources

Almost all the pictures are from arq. Carlos Alvarez

Other pictures: *Bogotá, the city* (1997). Bogotá: ediciones Gamma

Maps for Present challenge: Centro de Estudios de Desarrollo Económico CEDE of the University of the Andes (1998) *Bogotá – Sabana un territorio posible*. Bogotá: Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá

Maps from the POT: CD-Rom decreto 619 de 2000 by the Departamento de Planeación Distrital