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Beyond the public space tableau: Insurgent heritage and the right to the city in Bogotá

Abstract. This paper explores how the right to the city is understood and practiced in relation to public space by contrasting two models of urban planning in Bogotá, Colombia. It contrasts a best practice right to the city/public space model with an alternative vision for urban ordering based on participatory forms of living heritage. I argue that this represents a kind of insurgent heritage that offers a potentially rich and powerful concept for extending the right to the city to further push for including alternative worldviews and practices in planning and policymaking. To develop this argument, I discuss theories related to public space, the right to the city, and critical heritage. I then use these to discuss an ethnographic study of heritage planning in the Traditional Center of Bogotá.

Keywords: public space, urban planning, right to the city, critical heritage, Bogotá

Resumen. Este artículo explora cómo se entiende y practica el derecho a la ciudad en relación con el espacio público contrastando dos modelos de planificación urbana en Bogotá, Colombia. Contrasta una mejor práctica del modelo de ciudad/espacio público con una visión alternativa para el ordenamiento urbano basado en formas participativas de patrimonio vivo. Sostengo que esto representa una especie de herencia insurgente que ofrece un concepto potencialmente rico y poderoso para extender el derecho a la ciudad e impulsar aún más la inclusión de visiones del mundo y prácticas alternativas en la planificación y la formulación de políticas. Para desarrollar este argumento, analizo teorías relacionadas con el espacio público, el derecho a la ciudad y el patrimonio crítico. Luego los uso para discutir un estudio etnográfico de la planificación patrimonial en el Centro Tradicional de Bogotá.

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Palabras-claves: espacio público, planificación urbana, derecho a la ciudad, patrimonio crítico, Bogotá

Introduction

Urban public space takes many forms. It is never just a physical site in the city. It is always also an ideal—a utopic vision of how cities should be organized, as well as for whom, and by whom. Negotiations over how public space is imagined, managed, and used are, therefore, key aspects of enacting a greater right to the city (Mitchell, 2003). Here, the aim is to contribute to our understanding of how public space relates to the right to the city by exploring an innovative new approach to framing the relationship between these: the concept of insurgent heritage. Insurgent heritage (Novoa, 2022) combines critical urban planning theory with critical heritage studies to promote bottom-up forms of cultural development and preservation using a variety of participatory methods to help create more equitable and inclusive cities, particularly in contexts of the Global South. I apply this concept to contrasting urban planning ideologies demonstrated by different mayoral regimes in the 1990s and 2000s in Bogotá, Colombia.

Colombia was undergoing massive changes in the 1980s and 1990s. Through the 1970s, the country used a power-sharing agreement known as the National Front to balance control over the central government between its two political parties: the Liberals and the Conservatives. This was designed as a solution to the multiple civil wars that had been fought between the two in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, with a growing plurality of violence in the country spreading through multiple leftwing *guerrilla* organizations, rightwing paramilitaries, and the expansion of drug trafficking cartels, and with major international shifts in political economy taking place, the government sought a series of reforms to modernize and democratize Colombian governance to end the violence that plagued the country.

A new constitution was signed in 1991, and a series of decentralizing reforms opened up political competition (the two-party system was disbanded, and the popular election of mayors was initiated) and empowered local governments to take control of managerial functions like taxation and budget balancing, long-term strategic planning, infrastructure development, and control over social institutions like education and healthcare. While change remained relatively slow at the national level, these reforms incited an almost immediate political renaissance in Colombian cities (cf. Dávila, 2009)—especially Bogotá (cf. Berney, 2010; Gilbert, 2006).

In the early 1990s, Bogotá was seen as a city in “crisis” (Ferro, 2010). One of the earliest elected mayors there, Jaime Castro, who had been an instrumental figure in drafting national decentralization laws, described the city as “neither governable nor administrable as a result of a process that had been taking in place for several decades” (in Devlin et al. 2009, p. 1). The city was broke, it had one of the highest murder rates in the world, problems of corruption plagued the council and mayor alike, and as a result of all this, Bogotanos had little to no civic pride. The city was known to many as *la tierra de nadie* (a “no man’s land”).

However, following the implementation of decentralizing reforms at the national level, Bogotá underwent what became known as an “urban miracle” (Berney, 2011). A combination of fiscal reforms, a readjustment of the power balance between the council and the mayor, and the adoption of a new long-term city plan called the Plan de Ordenamiento Teritorial (POT) created a period of “good urban governance (Gilbert, 2006) that earned the city multiple international awards. It became a city after which others around the globe modeled their urban planning and development systems (Montero, 2017). This “miracle,” however, was (at least to some) a short-lived experience, as the mayors that led this best practice period (technocrats with little to no previous political experience) were replaced by a series of Leftist mayors that many feared would overwrite the gains the city had seen and return it to the dark ages (cf. Gilbert, 2010).

Others, meanwhile, began to offer critiques of the processes behind, and the outcomes themselves, of the more inclusive, equitable city that Bogotá had supposedly become. Public space and public transportation planning had been the heart of the “miracle” and were meant to enact a greater right to the city and enhance inclusivity in addition to improving quality of life and reducing violence. Yet many saw the outcomes of these projects (and the ideologies behind them) as actually creating, or reproducing, exclusions for the city’s most vulnerable—doing the very opposite of enacting a right to the city for all, as the inclusive public space planning rhetoric claimed (cf. Berney, 2013; Donovan, 2008; Galvis, 2014; Hunt, 2009).

Here, I want to deepen our understanding of the role that public space plays in enhancing (or detracting from) the right to the city by contrasting the best practice, “miracle” public space model in Bogotá with an alternative vision that arose from one of the mayors in the Leftist era that followed—Colombia’s current president, Gustavo Petro. The paper juxtaposes two (seemingly) opposed visions for public space and public culture development in Bogotá. One promotes passive (and pacifying) forms of citizen-space relations to enhance the right to the city “for all” Bogotanos, channeling a technocratic, top-down vision of “pedagogical urbanism” wherein public space is deployed as a physical tool for teaching (Berney, 2011, 2017). Meanwhile, the other promotes more active, engaged

efforts with a more focused approach to inclusion aimed at the city’s most marginalized through principles of “endogenous capacity building” and offers a more active approach to public space seen as part of integrated “cultural landscapes” (Instituto Distrital de Patrimonio Cultural, 2014).

To examine this second vision of urban planning and how it affects a right to the city, I adapt Novoa’s (2022) theory of “insurgent heritage.” Using this, I explore efforts to use “living heritage” by residents of Las Cruces—a marginalized neighborhood on the edge of Bogotá’s touristy Historic Center—to defend their community against potential redevelopment and gentrification threats, while also developing a more active ethic of place-based care in their community. Importantly, these efforts took place both in conjunction with and in defiance of government heritage officials, making them definitive examples of “insurgent heritage.” and developed my argument(s) for why viewing public space planning through insurgent heritage offers a unique, insightful approach to the right to the city, I will outline the concepts and theories that are key to these arguments. I will then briefly outline some significant recent historical developments related to public space planning in Bogotá, and define some of the key terms and underlying concepts employed in the two different visions of/for a more inclusive city that developed during the 1990s and 2000s.

Public space and the right to “the city”

Introduced by Henri Lefebvre (1996 [1968]), the right to the city functions as both a theoretical concept and urgent political demand and can be defined as a “renewed right to urban life.” Here, the “right to urban life” means equitable access to “the capacity to remake ourselves by remaking cities” (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968], cited in Uitermark et al. 2012, p. 2547). The word “renewed” emphasizes that achieving such a right is never complete but an ongoing struggle to constantly reimagine urban (co)existence and collective city-making.

Lefebvre did not see rights as natural endowments or legal protections but rather imagined them as *prefigurative*, meaning “they are political claims to possible rights *that will require mobilization and struggle*” (Purcell, 2014, p. 146, emphasis added). Lefebvre believed that the right to the city meant citizens eventually achieved total self-governance (*autogestion*), where people could collectively manage decisions themselves “rather than surrendering those decisions to a cadre of state officials” (Purcell, 2014, p. 147). However, even once realized, *autogestion* would require a constant struggle to be reestablished since it would need to be readapted to suit the changing desires and needs of the people.

If *autogestion*, or self-management answers the question of what (kind of) right the right to the city represents, then the answer to the question “what city?” lies in the materialist notion of dealienating, or re-integrating urban space. To Lefebvre (and other Marxist materialists), urban space had been expropriated by capitalist processes. That is, they had been alienated from their essential social functions and *use* values to maximize *market* value and pursue functions of profit. The planning and design of space under the theory of the right to the city would need to be adaptive, citizen-led, and respond to social rather than economic demands. In short, Lefebvre’s original formulation of the right to the city envisioned an urban environment controlled not by market forces and utopic visions of technocratic expert planners but by citizens themselves.

The right to the city has been applied to several urban public space issues over the years, but probably nowhere more comprehensively than in the work of Don Mitchell (2003, 2017). Mitchell applied the ideas of struggle and emergence underlying Lefebvre’s dialectical vision of prefigurative rights (i.e., they are in a constant state of renegotiation) to understanding public space amidst debates over whether such a space existed anymore. As privatization, marketization and other capitalist forms of urban land management created new forms of exclusion in cities, many lamented the end, or death of public space—particularly in America (cf. Kohn, 2004).

These arguments added to older descriptions of how modern capitalism and industrial urbanization contributed to what Sennett (1976) succinctly called “the fall of public man,” or the slow but steady dissolution of public life in the face of new labor structures, consumer habits, and other forms of modernity. Mitchell, while not dismissing these accounts out of hand, argued that even if such declines were genuinely taking place, they were not representative of an “end of public space,” but rather a dialectical process of citizens struggling to reassert control over the *ends* of public space or the purposes for which public spaces are “deployed socially, strategically, ideologically, as well as how they are used by myriad publics” (Mitchell, 2017, p. 503). Mitchell argued that, while new forms of exclusions and isolation were certainly arising worldwide in urban public space, new forms of resistance to these were also emerging to challenge them. Therefore, as much as some previous politics of public space may have been squeezed out, new forms were being invented and deployed to replace them.

It is important to note, however, that the politics of public space is not just something that unfolds *in public spaces themselves*. As Uitermark et al. (2012) argue, the city is more than just a backdrop, stage, or canvas upon which political action unfolds. Many theorists exploring emergent forms of public space politics in the face of privatizing enclosures and exclusions argue that it is through the *appropriation* of public space (literally, taking space over) that public politics unfold.

Two forms of politics (one “macro,” the other “micro”) tend to be viewed as relevant here. Proponents of the “macro” form emphasize the importance of *visibility* in measuring the political potential of urban space. These are scholars of urban social movements and political protest that show how ordinary spaces (plazas, streets, parks) can be taken over by groups to enact “extraordinary events” that can alter the trajectory of local, national, and even global politics (cf. Irazábal, 2008).

Those promoting a “micro” politics of public space, on the other hand, emphasize how individuals and groups occupying mundane spaces of the city as part of their everyday lives engage in small, often unconscious interactions with one another in a way that enhances the acceptability of (and diminishes fear and hatred of) others (cf. Amin, 2008). Whereas a macro-politics of public space appropriation envisions political change as a result of single, perhaps infrequent extraordinary events, political change is seen as a slow process built on millions of encounters in the city over time.

Both schools of theory participated in debates over the end of public space. Privatization and marketization had negative effects on the political value from both perspectives. For the macro-school, the growth of privately owned public spaces (POPs) that could be policed by private security and managed by rules established by private companies meant sites for political protest were disappearing—possibly so much so that the effectiveness of protest may be forever diminished (cf. Kohn, 2004). The rise of POPs, and a general increase in the use of urban public space for consumer practices similarly worried micro-politics theorists. The fear was that it wasn’t just large groups of protestors being excluded from public space by private security. Specific individuals would be prevented from accessing many of the city’s public spaces simply by their status or appearance. Middle- and upper-class consumer spaces may be less inviting to lower-income individuals. The same is potentially true for those of ethnic, racial, or religious minorities or, as the case has been historically, women, children, and the elderly.

Both critical explorations of changing patterns of public space appropriation and how new exclusions have arisen in cities as privatizing and marketizing forces have reshaped physical public space have their merits—some shared, some unique to each. Yet they both typically suffer from a shared flaw: a lack of attention being paid to what Iveson calls “procedural public space” forms, or what might be called “the right to assert the order of things” (Barnesmoore, 2008). Thinking in terms of procedural public space can, just as with the politics of public space appropriation (or what Iveson calls “topographical” dimensions of public space), be approached from different perspectives. On the one hand, it

entails thinking of how public space politics are shaped by deliberations and struggles *away from* city streets, parks and plazas, but *which seek to address* perceived deficiencies with these sites. These might involve events where communities are invited to debate over a potential new neighborhood project, like a park, or citizens taking concerns over their local public spaces to elected officials during council meetings. Another approach to this sees these decision-making sites as essential forms of public space themselves (cf. Parkinson, 2012).

In both cases, the idea is that what shapes inclusion and exclusion in public space takes shape over time and across physical spatial boundaries, and that both politics *in* public space, as well as political deliberations *over* public space, must be looked at to achieve the right to the city. It involves defining what things like “public space” or even “the city” mean in material and metaphorical terms. This is the ontological dimension of the right to the city, or the “right to assert the order of things,” as described by Barnesmoore (2008). To achieve social justice in cities, Barnesmoore argues, we must do more than promote more equitable access to spaces and resources. We have to do more to promote equity in Worldviews—in how different people see, understand, define, they *know* the urban world. This aligns closely with Lefebvre’s theory on the production of space (1992), which deepens the dialectical ideas involved in his theory of the right to the city. Lefebvre viewed the production of space as a trilectics of three interacting dimensions of sociospatial relations: abstract/conceived dimensions (maps, plans, imaginaries of what space should look like); perceived dimensions perceived space (how people think of space generally) and living space (a pre-reflexive combination of perceived and conceived space that shapes people’s everyday lives). While appropriations-focused theories of macro- and micro-politics focus a good deal of attention on the latter two, Barnesmoore notes how there tends to be less attention paid to how alternative abstract/conceived versions of cities are devalued and delegitimized. To enact a full right to the city. This, too, must be addressed.

The right to the city in the Global South: Moving from interactions in space to interactions with space through insurgent heritage

If the right to the city involves enhancing citizen control over city-making (concerning government and market control), and this involves accepting new forms of knowledge as legitimate contenders to hegemonic technocratic visions, then such thinking must necessarily be extended across scales to include differences between the Global North and Global South. Cities in the Global South have experienced very different historical trajectories than those in the North—where planning theory has traditionally been developed. New theories and practices from the global periphery must be accepted lest the pernicious effects of

colonialism be recreated through new forms of best practice policy and planning circulation (Robinson, 2002).

One group of theories has become a powerful tool for reimagining cities in a way that reflects the aforementioned goals of a complete right to the city center on the notion of “insurgency”—specifically, insurgent citizenship, and its related concept of insurgent planning. James Holston first described insurgent citizenship in relation to how the right to the city in the Global South offered organized movements of poor urban citizens an alternative way to confront entrenched national regimes of citizen inequality.

The promises of citizenship in modern nation-states had not been equally experienced by all in regions like Latin America, where, despite the fall of authoritarian dictatorships, democratic participation did little to alleviate socio-economic inequality. Here, then, the right *to the city* (or the right to the capacity to remake ourselves by remaking cities) became, for many, the only means for achieving a right to assert the order of things. If one couldn’t challenge the Worldview of capitalism through its own centers of power-sharing/decision-making (e.g. through voting, or purchasing power), then one might resort to insurgent tactics that expose the deficiencies of national citizenship, and enact a new form of subaltern citizenship through making new spaces and social formations in cities (Holston, 2009).

Planning theorists have adapted these ideas through frameworks of radical and insurgent planning (cf. Miraftab, 2009). Insurgent planning can be defined as “counter-hegemonic, transgressive and imaginative” insofar as they: “destabilize the normalized order of things; they transgress time and place by locating historical memory and transnational consciousness at the heart of their practices”; and they [promote] the concept of a different world as being...both possible and necessary” (Miraftab, 2009, pg. 33). More specifically, insurgent planning seeks to challenge hegemonic understandings of participation, and how these relate to notions of inclusion and sites of/for emancipatory action. It does so through articulating differences between what are called “invited” and “invented” spaces/forms of participation.

Invited spaces, while possessing grassroots origins, are actions that have been sanctioned by authorities as acceptable, legitimate forms of citizen engagement. Invented spaces, alternatively, are forms of unsanctioned actions designed to confront authorities and challenge the status quo. However, while articulating differences between these is important to understanding insurgent planning (invited spaces, after all, run the risk of becoming depoliticized or coopted by elitist, private-sector-driven decisions), it is the *fluidity* that exists

between these forms that makes insurgent practices of citizenship and planning so powerful. Constantly entangled in, or involved in entangling, inclusion and resistance, insurgent planning practices fluctuate between “formal and informal, legal and extra-legal, political and performative, traditional and innovative” initiatives (Novoa, 2022, 1021).

One way in which this type of fluid participation can enact transformative insurgent planning is through extending its less dichotomized conceptualization of grassroots movements to heritage and “emphasizing multiple voices, practices, senses, places, objects, memories and affects that span from the bottom up, and informal/ formal and official/unofficial arenas of political action” (Novoa, 2022, p. 1018). Intending to bridge critical heritage studies with urban planning theory, Novoa (2022, p. 1018) puts forth the idea of “insurgent heritage” to describe “the preservation of knowledge and actions that emerge from the collective life of people to address inequalities, oblivion, and exclusions in the production of the built environment in the global South.” Insurgent heritage involves focusing on the interaction between memory and work and place in shaping counter-hegemonic practices in urban environments, avoiding a materialistic, Eurocentric notion of heritage and its related ethics of preservation and care, and by opening up new political opportunities for *culture* to become an essential dimension of citizenship. By tracking locally developed ethics and practices of place-based care, this theory provides a framework for understanding not only how culture and heritage are living, evolving things but that these are political things actively involved in various forms of urban inclusion and exclusion.

Here, I adopt Novoa’s idea of insurgent heritage and reapply it to urban theories of the right to the city to shift our thinking about the politics of public space away from encounters *in* space and towards encounters *with* space. To do so, I explore projects developed in a historical neighborhood of Bogotá’s city center that involve both institutionally-supported mechanisms of heritage recovery (promoted by the Instituto Distrital de Patrimonio Cultural, District Institute of Cultural Heritage, IDPC) and grassroots movements stemming from these that leverage the idea of “living heritage” to enact neighborhood changes using public space in different ways *without* legitimization from the IDPC (which is in charge of planning and preservation in Bogotá’s historic neighborhoods). In so doing, I show how insurgent heritage can provide an alternative, more inclusive, and highly scalable means for enacting a greater right to the city for Bogotá’s inhabitants in a way that embraces (rather than rejects, or ignores) cultural diversity.

Before this, however, I turn first to outlining (briefly) a history of public space planning in Bogotá, focusing on how a renowned model of public space planning used an understanding of public space as a *punto de encuentro* (point of encounter) to enact a kind of right to the city “for all” that ultimately failed to

reduce inequality and increase inclusion. I show how this epoch of planning gave way (albeit only partially) to a new vision for inclusion and equality that focused less on public space, and more on housing. Despite this shift in *overall* focus, however, public space remained one of the key parts of a new Revitalization Plan that arguably represented the most successful application of the new inclusive vision that otherwise failed to gain traction in planning law.

The rise (and fall?) of the public space “miracle” in Bogotá

Two mayors who served three consecutive terms in the 1990s and early 2000s are largely credited with enacting Bogotá’s “urban miracle”: Antanas Mockus and Enrique Peñalosa (cf. Berney, 2010; Ferro, 2010). Mockus was a mathematician and philosopher with no political background. He was elected for a platform devoted to improving civic culture through innovative social policies. Peñalosa was also a political outsider and was elected for a focus on improving urban infrastructure in ways that would democratize the city spatially.

As noted in the introduction, since this period has already received a good deal of scholarly attention (critical and appreciative), this section does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of it. Instead, the goal here is to highlight certain fundamental tenets of these mayors’ planning ideals as they pertain to public space and the right to the city, and critically analyze these in relation how they failed to enact insurgent (i.e. invited *and* invented) spaces of participation. Two concepts in particular are of interest here: “citizenship culture” and “public space recuperation.”

“Citizenship culture” (also translated as “citizen culture,” or “culture of citizenship”) was a concept employed by Antanas Mockus as an innovative means to counteract Bogotá’s problems of violence and insecurity. The basic premise was that the best way to combat urban violence was to induce citizens to respect each other and thereby make peaceful interaction possible. Mockus understood violence as being rooted in a lack of shared values, a lack of communication, and mutual fear, and saw education as a necessary first step in creating the kind of mutual respect (and self-respect) needed to overcome these problems. Specifically, Mockus sought to employ both positive and negative reinforcement mechanisms to teach Bogotanos how to develop three separate but equally important, types of social regulation: self-regulation, mutual regulation and legal regulation (see Riano, 2011 for a comprehensive analysis of citizenship culture).

Enrique Peñalosa also focused on public space as the primary tool for accomplishing his policy goals, but did so in a more straightforward way.

Peñalosa sought to create a more egalitarian city by enhancing access to the city through new public spaces and public transportation networks. His administration invested heavily in new parks, libraries, and a massive new bus rapid transit (BRT) system called Transmilenio, as well as 250 kilometers of cycling networks. While some questioned the logic of investing the resources of an under-funded city like Bogotá in things like buses and bike lanes (instead of schools or healthcare), Peñalosa saw these as social equalizers, since it was the city's large low-income population that walked, biked and rode buses. Building more parks and public transit was a way to create equality in quality of life as a means to developing an egalitarian city (Cervero, 2005).

Rachel Berney (2010, 2011, 2013, 2017) offers a comprehensive critical overview of the role public space played in this era of urban planning and development, and refers to it as a paradigm of “pedagogical urbanism” (2011, 2017). This is defined as “a mode of urban development focused on citizen education and reform that produces figurative and material space in the city for educational encounters” at all scales of the city (Berney, 2011, p. 17). The main sites for this were local “educational spaces,” or “sites of citizen formation created through such strategies as interactions between different types of people and the learning and practice of sociable behavior through opportunities such as casual encounters and programmed offerings” (Berney, 2011, p. 21). However, these were strategically deployed across “equalizing networks” (or new transportation networks) that were meant to expand this ideal of citizen formation through interactions with different types of people to encouraging encounters with others *across* neighborhoods and city regions (Berney, 2011). Bogotá is highly segregated, with much of the middle- and upper-class residents living to the north of the city center, and its poor living to the south. So at the city scale, the center was meant to function as one massive interactive, educational space of encounter connecting the wealthy north with the largely poor south.

Here in the city center, many examples of this public space model's exclusionary flaws became most apparent. In particular, it is where major public space “recovery” or “recuperation efforts were conducted in some of the city's largest, most iconic public spaces like the San Victorino Plaza and Plaza España, in conjunction with a massive new municipal park (Parque Tercer Milenio, or Third Millennium Park) being built in 2002 on the site of the infamous Cartucho neighborhood that was demolished for its construction. Here, recovery/recuperation is a stand-in for relocating street vendors, homeless, and Afro-Colombians who were (under the new rhetoric of public space) seen as “invaders” (Donovan, 2008; Galvis, 2013; Hunt, 2009; Munoz, 2018).

The justification behind the concept of public space “recovery” differed slightly between the rationalizing of Mockus (it prevented the development of citizen culture in that it reproduced a lack of respect for the law) and Peñalosa (it

represented an invasion of public space by private interests, taking space away from all Bogotanos for the benefit of a few). But the effect was the same. Both ultimately deployed some institutional tools (including the police and developing a new agency called the Defensoría del Espacio Público, or Office for the Defense of Public Space, DADEP) to advance a series of policies aimed at eradicating “disorder” through the production and recovery of public space (Fernández, 2013).

It is for this reason that Hunt (2009, p. 331) describes the project of public space recovery as “a spatial technology of governance that codes structural inequalities as a question of culture while producing new forms of segregation in which citizens and street vendors have differentiated places and rights to mobility.” Specific individuals (homeless, street vendors, and Afrocolombians) did not fit the definition of the new Bogotano citizen and, therefore, had less of a right to access a public space that was supposedly developed “for all.”

Pedagogical urbanism was developed to promote a kind of multiculturalism by opening the city up spatially for new kinds of citizen interactions. Yet this was paradoxically pursued through policing and other exclusionary types of enclosure that ultimately prevented the development of greater acceptance of others in Bogotá (Berney, 2011, 2017). It recreated everyday discriminatory racial practices (Munoz, 2018) and, despite claiming to be based on the principle that public space is a “classless” space, it also reproduced (rather than counteracted) the city’s deep-seeded socioeconomic inequalities (Donovan, 2008; Hunt, 2009).

For this reason, Berney has described this planning paradigm as presenting a “tableau” of the right to the city rather than enabling its actual development. Here, “tableau” refers to a static scene on a stage; a frozen image of a desired projection (in this case, good public space and the right to the city). The reason Berney argues for this is that it appears that public space was developed as “a space in which to perform the image of citizenship that [Mockus and Peñalosa] needed to project to the world at large” to project the image of an entrepreneurial city (2013, p. 164). Rather than creating a real right to the city, Berney questions whether or not this simply created a spectacle of it. Or, as Cifuentes and Tixier (2012, p. 9) put it, the public space miracle represents “a unifying narrative, of rapid and efficient urban transformation” that was “internationally celebrated,” in a way that gave “a global logic to the whole process,” but which ultimately “helped to obscure the more complex and nuanced stories” and “situated controversies” involved in the actual development and deployment of urban public space as a physical site and ideal in Bogotá and ignore the “situated

controversies” that existed in master plans and the lived spaces they represent (Cifuentes and Tixier, 2012, p. 9).

Beyond the tableau: Revitalization as an alternative vision of the right to the city

It was not only critical scholars that saw the problems in the kind(s) of inclusion and equality being promoted by Peñalosa and Mockus. Bogotanos themselves, while happy with many of the developments these mayors produced, elected a series of Leftist mayors in the years that followed based in large part on the idea that these cared “more about the cyclist than the cycling path” (Cervero, 2005). However, Gustavo Petro has been said to offer the only significant challenge to the sociospatial paradigm of pedagogical urbanism (Eaton, 2022). While his predecessors (Luis Garzón and Samuel Moreno) were also from leftist parties that challenged the neoliberal, technocratic approach adopted by Mockus and Peñalosa, they largely continued their model of public space and transportation-led development (Ferro, 2010; Eaton, 2022). Between his four-year Municipal Development Plan, *Bogotá Humana* (Human Bogotá) (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2012), and his attempted rewrite of the city’s long-term Land Use Plan called the *Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial* (POT), Petro sought to overturn the exclusionary logic of the pedagogical urbanism model in particular by seeking to repopulate the city center through new strategic plans that offered affordable housing to the city’s poor there.

His new plan for a densified city center combined environmental and social motives to reduce the urban expansion on the urban periphery, and increase affordable housing in the city center. He called this model “green densification without segregation,” which he pursued through a new city center master plan, *El Plan Urbano del Centro Ampliado de Bogotá* (The Urban Plan for an Extended City Center of Bogotá) (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2014). In addition to relocating poor residents from far away, more affordable parts of the city, the goal was also to maintain the poor residents that lived in much of the city center that had been in slow decline for decades.

Petro faced massive political opposition, and the city council, developers, and the right-leaning national government blocked much of what he sought. His new Land Use Plan was never approved, and plans for public housing projects in the city center were largely abandoned. However, one area where Petro’s ideas did find footing was in his *Plan de Revitalización del Centro Tradicional de Bogotá* (PRCT). This focused his broader plans for the center *ampliado* (greater center) on expanding the right to the city in the areas of the center that stretch back as far as the sixteenth-century Spanish colonial era. Previously, only a small fraction of the old city had received comprehensive heritage treatment as “the

Historic Center” (namely, the *Candelaria* tourist district and the *Centro Administrativo* – the area surrounding the central *Plaza de Bolívar*, where the presidential palace and other central government institutions were housed, as well as the city’s cathedral). Mirroring objects of his larger *Centro Ampliado* plan, the Revitalization Plan also sought to expand the focus to a more extensive collection of neighborhoods and actors, including those that had suffered from decline and increased levels of poverty and crime. The name “Traditional Center” was adopted and applied to this larger area to overcome the narrow focus of previous heritage planning and preservation efforts.



Figure 1: Map of the Traditional Center of Bogotá and its constituent neighborhoods (Source: Secretaría Distrital de Planeación)

In addition to expanding the geographic boundaries of heritage in the city center, the PRCT sought to alter the way planning was done in heritage-dense central areas by moving away from planning tenets of “renovation” and towards a new concept of “revitalization” (Pérez Fernández, 2015). This involved a shift in development thinking. Here, the term “renovation” was seen as carrying a strongly modernist sense of physical determinacy (associated with “urban renewal”), whereas the language of “revitalization” was seen as containing stronger social and economic connotations or as constituting more dynamic and

holistic approach (cf. Gartner, 2015; Rojas, 2004). Essentially, the poorer areas of the center had usually been treated, in development terms, through large-scale demolition and reconstruction projects involving massive displacements of the poor. A holistic approach to revitalization involved retaining these inhabitants and including them in planning processes (promoting *permanencia*). This involved a shift in thinking about public space. Rather than a universalizing approach to recovering public space (making a public space better through technocratic design and offering this to a universally imagined, singular public sphere), this involved what heritage professionals called developing “endogenous” understandings of neighborhood dynamics and promoting these forms of knowledge in plans themselves. It went beyond the tableau, in other words, to incorporate more active citizen participation in new ways and with greater inclusivity.

Under Petro, the IDPC, the organization in charge of the Revitalization Plan for the Traditional Center (PRCT), developed plans focused on intangible, living heritage, or the culture, customs, and practices of local residents. They pursued this through four interconnected strategies:

1. Developing endogenous capacity: Seeking to recognize and strengthen capacities of the local population and local resources.
2. Embracing cultural landscapes: Seeking to understand the landscape as an economic, social, and cultural tapestry when planning the construction of space.
3. Promoting identity and permanence: Seeking to recognize resident population groups as the base for making proposals and for transforming the territory.
4. Pursuing diversity and a multi-scale approach: Seeking to take actions that work across the articulated scales of the city and its micro-territories and to maintain and augment a diversity of population, uses and activities. (Instituto Distrital de Patrimonio Cultural, 2015)

They pursued these strategies through articulated plans for different segments of the Traditional Center (what they described as “nodes”) that sought to build on local characteristics rather than apply a universalizing logic of good urban order.

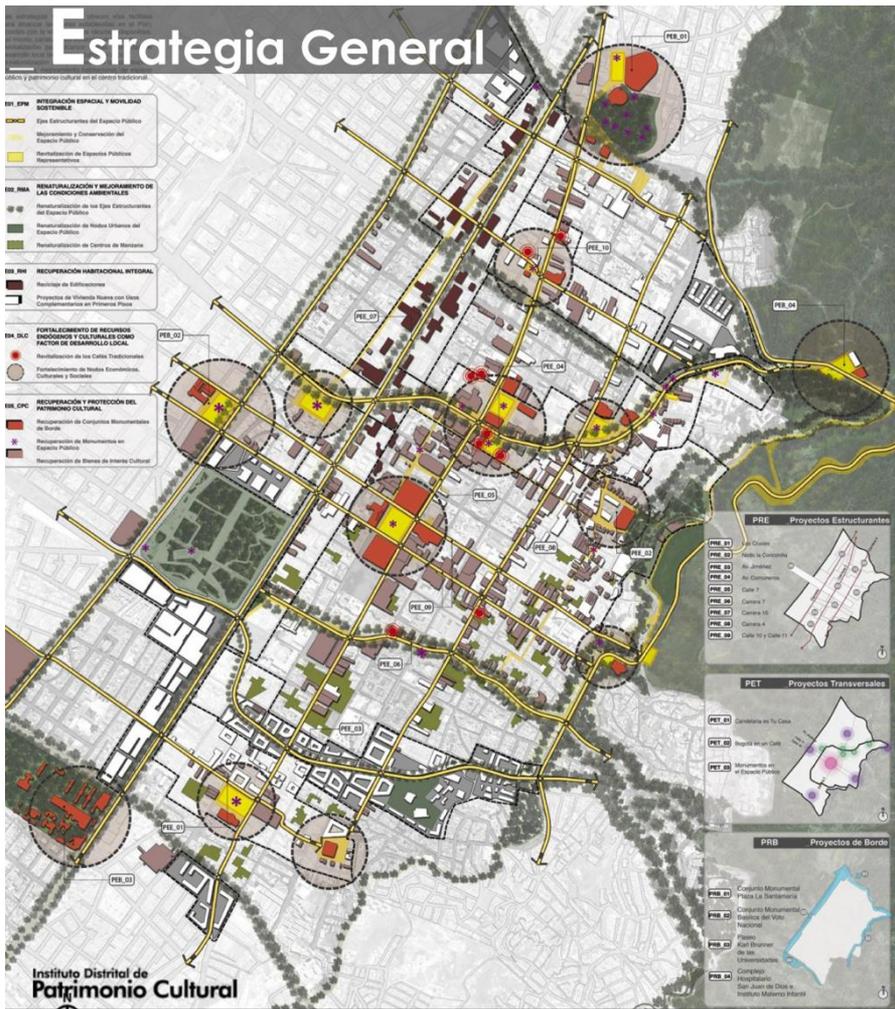


Figure 2: Map of IDPC project "nodes" in the Revitalization Plan for the Traditional Center (PRCT) (Source: Instituto Distrital de Patrimonio Cultural)

The IDPC outlined two particular strategies for using public space in this overarching strategy:

1. Strengthening a sense of community through public space appropriations and participation in the construction of public space, and
2. Recognizing local cultural practices and manifestations as part of the local landscape, including immaterial culture (Instituto Distrital de Patrimonio Cultural, 2015)

These approaches connected physical public space goals with procedural ones: it promoted local understandings of particular public places and used this knowledge to develop projects through greater and expanded forms of, citizen participation. The goal was to develop sustainable neighborhoods, or neighborhoods that could thrive as they saw fit and protect themselves from the incursion of urban renewal efforts that would displace not only the inhabitants but also their cultural heritage. Therefore, rather than a focus on recovering public space (which involved excluding and removing local actors), this involved recovering cultural attributes as a means to maintain and defend local actors. As one of the leaders of the IDPC's Local Development team described it,

There are a lot of cultural attributes that must be recovered, and must be strengthened, so that at the end of the day they will serve the neighborhoods as instruments to protect themselves from any type of intervention, or from any type of change in the city that could affect the *permanencia* of the communities. (interview, 8/19/15)

One of the “nodes” in this plan was the neighborhood of *Las Cruces*, located just south of the neighborhoods that constituted the core of the previously denominated Historic Center. Its boundaries are *la Avenida de Los Comuneros* to the north, *Calle 1a* to the south, *Carrera 3a* to the east, and *Carrera 10a* to the west.

The neighborhood's origins date back to the beginning of the colonial era, when, in 1655, a church called *el Señor de Las Cruces* was built. However, it remained largely rural until the 19th century, when, as the city began rapidly expanding, *Las Cruces* became an important industrial area and one of the city's principal *barrios obreros* (working-class neighborhoods). It was a particularly important producer of brick and tile, helping fuel construction and growth across the rest of Bogotá.

Even though the city has long since grown around it, the neighborhood has maintained a peripheral identity. Early on, it was literally peripheral. The nearby *Candelaria* housed the city's elite institutions and residents, while *Las Cruces* was an industrial and rural area home to farmers, indigenous peoples, laborers, and factory workers. Over time, however, as local industries disappeared, neighborhood dynamics changed. Eventually, literal/physical peripheralization was supplanted by new types of marginalization. *Las Cruces* began to be considered a *barrio popular* (informal neighborhood), and was

described as “vulnerable,” “marginal,” “dangerous,” and a “no man’s land” (*tierra de nadie*) (Abya Yala, 2016, p. 6, author’s translation).

These are the types of images, or phrases, that most *Bogotanos* associated with Las Cruces when the Revitalization Plan was developed. It was strongly associated with gangs, crime, violence, and poverty. Furthermore, new patterns of physical marginalization reappeared as modernizing renewal efforts (particularly efforts to expand road infrastructure in the center) cut the area off from surrounding neighborhoods.

The first example was the construction of the *Carrera Decima* in the early 1950s. This was one of the largest renewal efforts in the city’s history, and was dubbed ‘The Avenue of Modernity’ because of how it embraced the scale and architecture of the modernism movement (Murcia and Mendoza, 2010). While the *Decima* did increase the neighborhood’s connection to the rest of the city to the north, it also cut it off from Barrio San Bernardo – a neighborhood with very similar characteristics to Las Cruces (Caicedo, 2016). A similar rupture occurred with the expansion of the Avenida de los Comuneros in 2007, which cut the neighborhood off from Belen and La Candelaria, its neighbors to the north.

These excisions caused many local residents to resist renewal plans for the center during the best practice urbanism era of Mockus and Peñalosa – the Plan Zonal Centro de Bogotá, or simply “Plan Centro” (Secretaría Distrital de Planeación de Bogotá, 2007). Residents feared further isolation and exclusion. This is where the Revitalization Plan, and the idea of culture as a defense mechanism became relevant and potentially powerful. It emphasized Las Cruces as a part of the Traditional Center, and established new opportunities for inclusion through different interventions.

Here, I look at one such intervention. It involved the IDPC, local community leaders from the Junta de Acción Comunal (JAC) and groups of young people trying to connect their artistic passions to neighborhood and public space improvement efforts in order to enact a right to the city. I argue that these constitute a form of insurgent heritage involving both invited and invented forms of participation.

Hecho en Las Cruces²: A case study of insurgent heritage

In 2015, an open competition was held by the IDPC to fund projects related to cultural heritage under the aegis of a program called Apropiación del Patrimonio Histórico Urbano del Barrio Las Cruces (Appropriation of the Historical Urban Heritage of the Las Cruces Neighborhood). The two selected projects produce a

² Abya Yala (2016)

book called *Hecho en Las Cruces: Por la Permanencia en el Territorio* (Abya Yala, 2016), and a hip-hop documentary called *De la Cuna al Hip-Hop* (2016).

The book (*Made in Las Cruces: For Permanence in the Territory*) was a project of the *Colectivo Artístico y Cultural Abya-Yala* (Abya-Yala Cultural and Artistic Collective, or simply *Abya Yala*). This group of young women and men focused on using art and culture to promote peace and bring awareness to people's potential for being agents for change in their own lives and in their local communities (interview, 9/17/16). The objective of this book was to extend their project: to contribute to the recognition and visibility of the spaces, knowledge, practices, and traditional trades of the *Las Cruces* neighborhood, "from the experience and history of its inhabitants – who are its protagonists – and strengthen the neighborhood's identity and its empowerment for the defense of the territory" (Abya Yala, 2016, p. 7). In December 2015, the group got more than 80 local residents involved in an auto-ethnographic exercise called *cartografía social* (social mapping). They conducted interviews, took pictures, and participated in local community celebrations/activities to record the evolving living history and culture of the neighborhood from the point of view of its inhabitants.

The documentary (*From the Cradle to Hip Hop*) was also a historical, ethnographic endeavor, but it focused specifically on the history of hip hop in *Las Cruces* and the role it has played in positively benefiting the local community. As two brothers from a local rap group called Nazari Sound told me, the music got them involved in improving *el entorno* (their surroundings). It was music that "changed their way of thinking" and "got them thinking about making a better community" (interview, 9/20/16). This was the message promoted by the documentary: that hip-hop music (and its associated art forms of dance and graffiti) function as sources of interconnection and community development. As a local rapper interviewed by Abya Yala (2016, p. 15) put it "hip-hoppers propose social transformation through what we do, beyond dancing, singing, painting. There is a social construction that allows us to grow as people and contribute to our territory."

These projects and their participants did not just seek to record and share the significance of cultural history. They also sought to actively *reproduce* it, or to actively participate in defining what culture and heritage meant in terms of the relationship between the people (community) and space (neighborhood) of *Las Cruces*. In both cases, these groups not only sought to recover cultural heritage through the mediums of film and print, but also public space, through community-led (and government-supported) improvement and beatification efforts. Processes such as this were established to recover the neighborhood's cultural history, and

this was done both through, and to encourage, active forms of physical improvements: using artistic representations alongside cleanup efforts to add significance to physical public spaces in the neighborhood. Importantly, this was done in order to defend the *barrio* from encroaching development. It was seen as an act of defiance against a powerful force of planning and development (renovation) that seemed blind and/or impervious to the (cultural) values of local residents, seeing only the (economic) value of local buildings and spaces. It was about creating a strong Las Cruces *community* that would stand up to defend its *territory*.

This establishes a clear connection between efforts to improve the (physical) neighborhood and the (sociocultural) community, and this connection was not just abstract. Instead, it was established in practice, through actions to maintain or improve, the territory of neighborhood (*el entorno*). In other words, efforts to beautify (*embellecer*) the neighborhood became efforts to produce a local public (space). The physical *barrio* became connected to the social *comunidad* through collective improvement endeavors. Preservation was about people and their practices, not about old buildings. “After all,” one Aya Yala member concluded, “we are the heritage” (interview, 9/17/16).

At its most basic, this praxis of community-led, community-focused public space recovery manifests itself in efforts to establish a more attractive neighborhood aesthetic. This consisted of a two-part strategy. The first part of the strategy was pursued through physical interventions into “recuperating the street” (interview, 08/27/2016), which primarily entailed addressing problems of garbage that were associated with crime and insecurity through improving the physical conditions of public space. It was about changing the aesthetics of public space *as a community* to change the social psychology of its inhabitants (who would, in turn, hopefully prevent future abuses).

The second strategy revolved around providing the social tools needed to reproduce these activities, namely developing leadership skills and a culture of participation. This involved promoting an endogenous culture of citizenship developed not through a series of government-led initiatives, but through community-led projects that both required and produced local knowledge.

Aya Yala and local hip-hop groups articulated these two goals through public space restoration projects that they organized themselves, with other community members, and which were infused with their own cultural values. Efforts began with identifying areas where people were illegally dumping trash. Groups would clean these areas up, and remove all the trash. The next step was installing a piece of art where trash had been accumulating, with the idea being that people would be less willing to dump garbage on, or in front of, a piece of artwork that was locally produced. Not only were these now beautiful works, but

they were *their* works, something from their own neighborhood/community. Various street corners, walls, alleys and staircases were transformed from images of dereliction and decay to brightly colored works of art, and symbols of life.



Figure 3: Public space recovery efforts inspired by ideals of living heritage in Las Cruces (Source: Author)

This was not framed as an effort to recover some detached, abstract sense of history, however, but as an attempt to reclaim, and renew, personal *memory*. “*El tema de la memoria es muy importante al proceso*” (“the issue of memory is very important to the process”) (Abya Yala member, interview, 09/17/2016). Remembering is a more active form of history *making* – a personal process of relating oneself to the story of a place. It helped establish a greater sense of community by making people feel more connected to the histories of others, and also established a kind of *pertinencia* (relevance) for processes of recovering neighborhood public spaces, as the neighborhood became a more cohesive physical place and social ideal with which individuals had a more personal relationship. his relevance was reproduced and reinforced through efforts to improve physical public space, efforts which became part of processes of establishing a *memoria* associated with a politically active community.

I was invited to participate in these efforts on one occasion (9/25/16), when the groups were working on improving a small neighborhood park called Parque San Rafael Lote. The park was a typical example of those classified as “pocket parks” in Bogotá: little more than a small patch of grass with benches and a couple of trees. A handful of young men and women were dispersed throughout, working individually on painting the facades of buildings surrounding the park. Under the trees, a few women had a large kettle boiling over a fire sitting in a portable metal fire pit. People sat around peeling potatoes and chopping vegetables for a stew to be shared with the day’s volunteers. Elsewhere, I recognized a few young men were setting up some speakers. Soon the small park was filled with music.



Figure 4: Parque San Rafael Lote in Las Cruces (Source: Author)

Speaking with some of the individuals present, I was reassured time and again that these types of events really made people feel they had a “strong sense of community,” and that they felt there was “a lot of support for the types of cultural efforts that they were making today” (Community member, interview, 7/9/16). Notably, they noted that the work had nothing to do with the city government but was completely self-initiated and self-funded. They had gathered all the resources from local residents and businesses, through things like donations and discounts, but also from their own pockets.



Figure 5: A grafitero painting a mural as part of public space improvement efforts in Las Cruces (Source: Author)

This is where the strategy of recovering the public space establishes a sense of community merged into an ideal of *formación* (growth and development). Communities could be improved while community leaders were developed alongside local cultural heritage. The artistic processes I was observing were producing talented, multidimensional young people with skills beyond the art they were practicing and, at the same time, generating a sense of community. Yenny, a local activist and researcher, framed this as artistic groups “teaching more than just art.” In their efforts to organize and improve their neighborhood, and in dividing up different responsibilities amongst themselves, they were learning valuable leadership skills, which included community-organizing. These skills were subsequently passed on to other people that got involved in their activities. As Yenny explained, these kinds of groups were “trying to do something more” than just art, “taking actions that really mean something.” Hip-hop in particular, she said, “has been adopted, adapted and applied by local young people to the context of their own world, their own stories, their own *barrio*” (Yenny, interview, 8/27/16). If ever there was a clear example of how cultural heritage could promote the right to the city, this was it.



Figure 6: "Liderismo" at work: Artists sharing their work with community members

Discussion and conclusions

The case study presented here clearly exemplifies many of the tenets of insurgent heritage and its close cousin, insurgent planning. Working together with the government (the IDPC) and independently, groups of individuals not traditionally involved in urban planning (specifically young people) pursued ambitious projects related to “recovering” and promoting local (i.e. endogenous) forms of heritage. These were seen as deeply personal and communal forms of culture—*memorias* of a shared heritage that signified much more than a promise of some vague, impersonal “citizen culture.” Considering this, I argue that the combined invited and invented forms of cultural participation described here represent a far more complete and politically active vision of the right to the city than that developed during the best practice “miracle” years.

Here, public space stopped being an abstract backdrop against which classless citizens could be exposed to one another and develop a unified sense of belonging and became a forum through which (and around which) local memories could be translated into community defense mechanisms as well as tools for developing a greater sense of community, and new generation of leaders to guide this. Rather than this being the product of some claim to *Boguntad* – an empty

signifier – this was produced through a politics of the right to remain in the territory and project local cultural values onto *el entorno*.

This is not to completely discount the value gained from the years of Mockus and Peñalosa. What the pedagogical urbanism model did accomplish was a reinvigoration of passion for public space in Bogotá. I observed this time and again in my research. It also inspired citizens to organize responses to what they felt were inappropriate public space plans, designs, and occupations/uses. What it did *not* accomplish was the creation of solid and lasting mechanisms for binding locally-derived passions to reshape the social and spatial contours of the city at large. It also did not translate, as discussed above, into strong mechanisms for enhancing equality for Bogotá's more marginalized residents. The ideals codified in the Revitalization Plan (developing endogenous capacity, embracing cultural landscapes, promoting identity and permanence, and pursuing diversity and a multi-scale approach) directly address many of the shortcomings associated with the reproduction of inequality associated with the public space model of pedagogical urbanism, which explicitly sought to teach *all* citizens to behave alike in a manner decided upon by technocratic experts. The role of public space in pursuing these principles did the same. The goal of strengthening a sense of community through not just public space appropriations but by inviting citizens to participate in the construction of public space exemplifies the kind of fluidity that characterizes insurgent planning and heritage—especially insofar as it explicitly involves recognizing local cultural practices and manifestations as part of the local landscape, including immaterial culture.

The case study described above shows that these principles and strategies were put into practice in meaningful ways that worked towards establishing an alternative, bottom-up ontology of the city to build a greater right to the city. It shows the development of local participatory publics designed around problems and solutions perceived from the context of “the community,” rather than an abstract “public.” It also shows how these do not *necessarily* entail independent efforts but processes of state formation. Through projects like the one described above, in other words, it was not just community groups being produced but also new governance approaches and institutions to match these (the IDPC's revitalization strategy). *Formación* did not occur in isolation from government institutions, but the two co-evolved.

Living and intangible heritage represent a strong tool for democratizing public space planning and recovery efforts in a way that constitutes a more complete right to the city than pedagogical urbanism. Its grassroots, identity-laden roots extend upwards and outwards to encompass larger groups and state entities. Instead of a tableau of the right to the city is imagined and designed outside and above the scale of the neighborhood and community, it allows for the right to assert the order of things to evolve through fluid overlapping of invented and

invited spaces of participation that make a more inclusive, democratic physical and political public space.

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