The Role of Open Spaces in Connecting Popular Settlements Within and Beyond, Two Cases from Bogota

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Abstract

This paper is based on an ongoing Doctoral research, which aims to understand how open spaces in popular settlements work and the way in that locals produce, transform, use and give meaning to those spaces. The paper is about the role of open spaces in connecting and integrating popular settlements within, with the city and beyond; aiming to discuss to what extent these places help to the open city within. The subject is examined in three themes: the production of informal urban space; the uses and connections; and the relation between people and place and the language of the place. For the purpose of this paper two cases were chosen to explore the subject and present preliminary findings. A qualitative approach was employed and a range of methods for data collection. It was also used the author’s understanding and experience gathered in more than 10 years of research and engagement with people in these settlements and beyond. The paper concludes that popular settlements are fully integrated to the city, they are the city; and open spaces contribute significantly to this.
1. Introduction

This paper is based on the ongoing study called: ‘Production, Use and Meaning of Open Spaces in Popular Settlements in Bogota, Colombia’. The research is framed on empirical data of nearly 60 cases the author has gathered from informal settlements of Bogota in the last few years. Among them, six cases were selected and studied further within a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews, observation, and mapping were used as the main tools to collect the data. Two cases are presented in this paper; one barrio is in the first stages of development, Aguas Claras; and the other is in the process of consolidation, Danubio. The argument presented here aims to discuss the role of open spaces in informal settlements in contributing to the open city within. The later is understood as connection and integration strategies of different parts of the city and the people who use those parts, with the city as a whole and the urban life. Are popular settlements ghettos or marginal areas within the city? Are informal dwellers isolated from the rest of the citizens? To what extent open spaces contribute to connect these settlements to the city? Can we trace elements of connection in the form and language used in these settlements? And in the relation people and place?

The paper will first set up the context of popular settlements in Bogota within literature on the subject, followed by notions of open and public spaces and their importance in these settlements. These places play an important role in the physical and social dynamics of the barrios; and the same as housing, they are largely developed by local people. However, very little attention has been given to them, comparing to the extensive literature on housing issues. Secondly, the methodology is presented, including explanations on methods and analysis tools; finishing this part with a brief introduction to the cases. In the third part, main discussion is presented, which is structured in three themes: production of informal urban space; uses and connections; and relations between people and place and the language of the place. Finally, conclusions will be drawn by returning to the main questions of the paper on connections and in terms of the physical, social, economic and cultural ways.

2. Popular Settlements and Open Spaces in Bogota

Informal or popular settlements in Bogota are normally peripheral sectors characterized by specific economic, social and cultural conditions (relatively different from the rest of the city) and in terms of housing and urban facilities, there are in a great deal what the local people
have done of them. They have been developed largely by means of self helped and self managed strategies, sometimes with very little support from public or private bodies.

The origin of these settlements is land acquired in one of the following ways: the ‘standard way’ (purchasing of plots from public or private companies), clandestine (plots that are bought from illegal developers, known as ‘pirate’ developers), or land invasion. Once the land is ‘secured’ (when people feels established, secure does not necessarily mean legalization, which can sometimes take 10, 20 years or more) a continuous upgrading process begins in housing and urban space and facilities; from a very basic shelter and almost no urban space to elaborated two, three and even four storey buildings and urban commodities. Local people respond to their situation and develop their own settlements through the construction of housing, community infrastructure and welfare services.

But peripheral areas consist not only of illegal spontaneous buildings; there are also governmental programmes and more recently, private sector initiative projects. In spite of some interesting developments, many upgrading/improvement programmes, projects and initiatives offered to the people have serious problems in terms of providing what people need, expect and can afford. The community of settlers cannot depend on such projects, instead and whatever the origin of the settlement, they achieve full development thanks largely to self help practices; both in terms of urban improvement and housing upgrading.

In spite of being relatively neglected among public policies and practitioners, popular settlements are the urban reality and the future for a large portion of Latin American cities; they could be even the key for the 21st century and can give important lessons in terms of richness, inventiveness and achievement (Brillembourg Tamayo, Feireiss et al. 2005). In the same direction, this research also intends to contribute to the debate on informal settlements which seeks to see them not necessarily as a problem to be bulldozed but as an opportunity to understand different ways of seeing and thinking the city (Brillembourg Tamayo, Feireiss et al. 2005; Brillembourg and Klumpner 2009; Fiori and Brandao 2009; Kellett and Hernandez 2009; Roy 2009 among others)

In these settlements, open/public spaces play an important role in the physical and social dynamics; and the same as housing, they are largely developed by local people. Contrary to some authors suggestions, open spaces are important since the beginning of the settlement,
the settlers always ask where the open spaces and the urban facilities are going to be. However the improvement of such spaces may not come until many years later.

For Segovia and Oviedo (2000) public space is the opposite to private, but what define this space is not the ownership, it is the use. Nino and Chaparro define public space as urban outdoor spaces, such as parks, streets, sport pitches, green urban areas; but also as collective used buildings, like community rooms, churches, schools, retail shops; in general those places where ‘social relationships are built according to social and cultural exchanges’ (Nino and Chaparro 1997: 5). Viviescas presents public space as the expression scenario of the people, the place for confrontation and cultural production, the place to discuss the material and transcendent matters of individuals and societies, ‘the place to build community’ (Viviescas 1997: 5). Open spaces? Built Spaces? Private? Public? Communal? All of them are different and mean different things. For the case of this research, we are using open spaces as opposite to close (built) ones, and different also from public spaces; which as Madanipour (2003) points out, they are ‘the impersonal spaces of the city’, not the case of popular settlements3.

The basic open space in the barrio is the pavement and the street (Nino and Chaparro 1997). They are circulation areas and the extension of the house and many times of the store too. Sometimes in the evening, chairs are taken out to the street and people talk to each other; some shops take their goods outside to make them more visible for the costumer. The street is also the playground, children play with others in front of their houses. Stairs are also streets, very important and very used because of the topography in these areas.

Other important open spaces in the barrio are those for recreation and meeting (usually they are mixed together, the same square is good for a community meeting and a football game). Morphology varies; some of them are spare spaces with no recognisable form. These spaces are also where material objects that give meaning to the community are placed, some are self evident, a statue for example, others are less, a painted rock where young people meet. Others public spaces in the barrio are less evident but equally powerful, the bus stop and the corner bakery. (Nino and Chaparro 1997).

Open spaces are the most important social places in the barrio; they are also the place for cultural exchange and building values (Nino and Chaparro 1997; Viviescas 1997; Segovia and Oviedo 2000; Hernandez Bonilla 2001). They are often associated with a pedestrian use
3. Methodology

The research is structured around the interrelationships between people and open spaces in informal settlements in Bogota; aiming at the following questions:

1. How is open space designed, built, managed, transformed and sustained?
2. What is the relationship between these spaces and the people?
3. How could they be understood and interpreted?

A qualitative approach was selected to develop the research because among other characteristics, it allows to explore the subject within its context, in other words, the context is as important as the subject of enquiry itself (Yin 2003; Corbin and Strauss 2008). Similarly, a qualitative approach gives the author the opportunity to incorporate the knowledge and experience gathered from an ‘intense and prolonged’ contact with the field of study (Miles and Huberman 1994) of more 10 years of doing research and engagement with key actors within and beyond the settlements.

The Doctoral research is based on 57 empirical cases undertaken from 2003 to 2007, and from them, 6 cases were selected to go into further detail during the fieldwork carried out at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. For the purpose of this paper two cases were chosen to explore the subject and present preliminary findings. Methods used to collect the data involved semi – structured interviews, observation, mapping, informal chats, photos survey, photo elicitation, maps and documentary sources. Data was organized by cases and to a certain extent packed into the three research questions. Transcriptions, notes, maps and photos were analysed, compared to literature and checked against the research questions. Drafts analysis reports were prepared for each case study, then comparisons between cases and further analysis was carried out.

The cases are Danubio and Aguas Claras, two barrios located in the south – east and east peripheries of Bogota. Both settlements were created nearly at the same time, however their
histories have been different and their open spaces, although share some characteristics, they are different too.

The Places: El Danubio and Aguas Claras

The barrio el Danubio was developed on private and public land invaded by the first squatters in the beginnings of the 1980s. The first squatters started dividing the land and selling to families that came to the place looking for a plot of land of their own. Conflict was held at the beginning, but finally the company and the government agreed to sell and started transferring titles to the families, still an ongoing process. The barrio was legalised in 1994, but in 2008 only around 50% of the 2,541 plots had ownership deeds. The case to be studied is the main park of the barrio, although some references will be made to the main street and other open spaces. The park has two multipurpose pitches (micro- football and basketball), one playground with play furniture and several paved and green zones with urban furniture. It is located in one of the barrio’s border and the topography is very steep.

Figure 1: Danubio’s park (source: author)

Aguas Claras was developed through what is called: pirate urbanisation. The illegal developer bought a potato farm in the west outskirt mountains of Bogota in the late 1980s, subdivided the land, organized the layout of blocks and streets and started selling the plots as urban land. The barrio has not been legalised (2009) yet and it is a matter of dispute between the people
and the planning authorities (paradoxically, some other local authorities seem to support them, for example Samuel Moreno, the current Major of the city visited the settlement in January 2009 and tacitly expressed his support). Water and sewerage was, and still is, organised by the community. Energy was made available by the public company soon after first settlers arrived and telephones were in use since 1995. Currently more than 300 families live in the barrio. The open spaces in Aguas Claras are the streets and two parks. Among the streets, there is one that gathers most people and activities: the main street which is also the way in and out from the barrio, it finishes at the bus stop at the very end of the settlement and the city. Among the parks, there is also one more important than the other, where the multi-pitch is located and other leisure and sport facilities are placed as well.

Figure 2: Aguas Claras main street (source: author)

4. The production of informal urban space: segregation or integration?

“When we first arrived to Aguas Claras there were few houses, but most of the streets were clearly established. Our plot was demarcated but was full of bushes; it was hard to clear it and start making our first home. We did not know where the park ['parque del barrio'] was, but we knew it was somewhere”. (Interview with Maria, Aguas Claras’ resident, 2008)

In both cases, outdoor spaces had a place in the first designs of the barrios, although their importance and use came after houses were initially developed. Location in both cases are marginal, in Danubio the park started as a spare piece of land surrounding a stream that came
down from the top of the mountain; in Aguas Claras the park is placed at the border of the settlement. The open spaces were to be located in spare land were no plots could be sold because no houses could be built; however these places were and still are important to the people.

Production and consolidation processes of the settlement and the urban spaces have been largely in the hands of the community. In Danubio the park was built on unstable land, and the houses at each side of the stream were at risk. The community organised themselves and after several months and a lot of work involved, they could ‘solve’ the problem, with little support from the municipality although the settlement was legal since 1994. Paradoxically Aguas Claras, which remains unrecognised by the municipality planning authorities, accessed public funds to improve the park based on a community project, under a municipality programme called Pedagogic Outcome Works (OSP for the initials in Spanish); however it has not been possible to secure drinking water because of its ‘illegality’.

But community and municipality are not the only actors in the production and transformation of urban space in popular settlements; politicians have also played an important role. In Danubio local politicians ‘helped’ (in exchange of support in the next elections) the community with resources and contacts to build the park; in Aguas Claras they ‘make the bridge’ to secure public funds for the park. Politicians were and still are a major force behind the development of popular settlements in Bogota, contributing to make even weaker the ‘line’ between formality and informality, or legal and illegal:

“In this very same chair (referring to the chair I was sitting inside her humble house) two candidates to Major of Bogota (in different elections) were seated in: Mr Caicedo Ferrer and Mr Juan Lozano (both have been Senators, and Lozano is currently the Minister of Housing, Territorial Development and Water. Caicedo Ferrer was the Major of Bogota for one period – however when he went to the barrio he was a candidate for second period but he did not win-, and Lozano lost the elections against Luis Garzon. They have been very good to our barrio” (Interview with Maria, Aguas Claras’ resident, 2008)

The transformation and consolidation of the open spaces in Danubio and Aguas Claras is interrelated to their use, as Harvey (1996) explains: production and consumption processes
work in a dialectical relationship. Both cases have a main street, which is the basic transport, shopping and meeting place of the *barrio*; however in Danubio because of its growth and development there are other streets and parks that became important. In Aguas Claras the main street remains as the principal open space of the barrio. Transport and open spaces have played an important role in the development of these two *barrios*, in Danubio the Transmilenio (rapid public transport system on exclusive roads) has changed the way people connect with the city; while in Aguas Claras the ‘busetas’ (small buses) get the people in and out from the settlement. Transmilenio’s buses (describe by Gilbert as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of recent transport reforms in Bogota (2009)) has brought a lot of dynamics (and disorder?) to the already busy main street in Danubio, creating and re-creating almost on a daily basis the open space and its use. Transport does not only bring connection to the rest of the city and vice versa, but also generates a dynamic within the barrio that can be also understood in terms of socially and culturally connections.

Figure 3: Aguas Claras bus stop (source: author)

Figure 4: A ‘buseta’ in the front and a transmilenio feeder bus at the back. In Danubio (source: author)
Since the production of the urban space there are several connecting strategies that can be observed in popular settlements. It can be argued as some authors suggest (Kellett and Hernandez 2009; Lara 2009; Segre 2009) that there is formal planning in these ‘unplanned’ informal settlements. Both in Aguas Claras and Danubio an orthogonal grid layout of standard blocks is observed, with minor changes because of the topography. It may be seen ‘as the imposition of an ‘ideal’ social order through rigid planning which makes tangible in built form and space the power and value system of those in authority’ (Kellett and Hernandez 2009). These may be unconscious planning ideas of the informal settlers could be also read as a way of becoming part of the city by imitating others in more affluent parts of the city and ‘aspire to create conventional, legal, fully-serviced neighbourhoods’ (Kellet 2009: 3).

Transport and open spaces could be also read as integration strategies, both in terms of physical and aspirational connectivity. Transport can transform social activities, the same as urban layouts, as it is the case of Danubio and Aguas Claras. Open spaces can be also interpreted as connections tools of the barrio dwellers with the city, the same as having a proper house, having a park is important. As explained earlier, first settlers ‘need to’ know where the barrio’s park is going to be, although perhaps it won’t very much use, as in Aguas Claras. Kellett (2009) suggest that this can be interpreted as an aspirational journey from poverty towards prosperity, from the past towards the future, from exclusion towards inclusion and from margins towards the centre.

It can be said that the production of urban space in informal settlements is aimed at integration of the settlement within and with the rest of the city. Conscious and unconscious actions carry out but informal settlers but also by other actors, as the municipality and local politicians, go in the same direction. Perhaps every actor follows its own agenda, but the final objective is the same.

5. Uses and connections

“There are a quite large number of bars in the barrio, perhaps too many. People use to drink beer especially on Fridays and Saturdays, but any evening is good too. They buy the beer inside the bar, and weather permitting he or she takes the bottle to the
pavement and chair from the store [or in an improvised chair: a box for example] to drink and chat with friends” (Interview with Carlos, Danubio’s JAC president, 2008)

As explained earlier, open spaces in informal settlement tend to be used intensively (compared to more affluent areas of cities) because the private and indoor spaces are generally small and limited. At the same, these spaces are crucial to help to build social and cultural links between the barrio community within and with the city (Nino and Chaparro 1997; Viviescas 1997; Segovia and Oviedo 2000; Hernandez Bonilla 2001). In other words, open spaces in informal settlements are not only functionally used but also socially, culturally and symbolically significant.

The main street is the centre of the social and functional life of Aguas Claras. Most of the barrio dwellers get in and off the bus in this street and walk to their houses; bringing a lot of attention to it. This situation is stressed by the location of two important gathering facilities at the two ends of the street: at the ‘top’ the last bus stop and at the ‘bottom’ a temporary built Catholic church. The functionality of the street is completed by several shops located along it. The big park does not have as much as activity as the main street; it has different kind, times and users. Similarly Danubio has a very busy main street, which is also the centre of the commercial activity of the barrio and also the only route to get in and out. But in this case, the park is arguably the centre of the social and recreational life of the community, a place to meet others, to rest from the daily activities, to hold sports and community events, but above all it is the main space for children to play.

Activities in the open spaces of both settlements are boosted by the commercial offers around, activities that generate buildings - outdoors interchange, but also some of those are extended or developed into the open space. In front of the bus stop in Aguas Claras, many activities are observed: people having a coffee and piece of bread (‘un tintico con pan’), smoking a cigarette, making a phone call or checking emails/internet from one the cyber-cafe (interesting subject that is common to other Latin American countries, see Averweg and Villanueva 2009) buying from a street vendor, chatting with friends while waiting. In Danubio something similar is observed: there are a few stores in front of the park which sells snacks, ice creams and beers (among other things), ‘tiendas’ that make an important contribution not only to the social activities of the barrio but also to their economics (Coen, Ross et al. 2008).
Traditional games with traces in rural traditions are also found in the open spaces. ‘Tejo’ is played in Aguas Claras and ‘Rana’ is seen played in Danubio in some terraces together with music and drinks, and sometimes even dance. Another element in the same direction: a loud speaker located on the main street of Aguas Claras to make announcements from the Community Action Group (JAC for the initials in Spanish), to call for a meeting, to announce someone from the government is coming, to advertise a campaign or even to invite to vote in the elections. In some Colombians villages, the loud speaker can be also found but in the central park or square, close to the Church, and it is ‘administreted’ by the priest. These activities come from provincial and rural areas and they subsist only in parts of the city, especially in informal settlements.

Figure 5: ‘Tejo’s’ pitch in Aguas Claras (source: author)

Consumption of open spaces can be also seen as linking strategies; however these connections may go beyond the settlement and the city and can be also addressed to local or rural traditions and even international trends at the same time. We can start by claiming that open spaces are much more used in these settlements that in wealthier areas of the city, streets are full of people, activities and dynamism; linking the barrio within. Connections in terms of use can be also seen in terms of economic expressions; ‘La tienda del barrio’ (the barrio’s store) is not only a trading place, but also a social centre of the community (Coen, Ross et al. 2008). Formal and informal economic activities, as the street vendors for example (see more on street vendors in Bogota in Donovan 2008) are part of the dynamics of Danubio and Aguas Claras; and they can be associated with the centre of the city.
Some others expressions and uses of the open spaces can be interpreted as connecting strategies with the city and beyond, in Danubio and Aguas Claras at least three are observed: religion, rural games and traditions and cyber cafes. It can be argued that religious traditions and beliefs make an important presence in the settlements, however, a massive use of these facilities is not observed. It seems they represent something important, in other words, they have a more symbolic significance than an everyday meaning in terms of faith. This could be read as a connection with the city, in how people want to be, as they perceive, are the rest: if not religious people, at least having a church. Rural games or the loudspeaker in the main street tell an apparently different story, the interest here is to connect with the rural past, past that in many cases is very recent. Another connection that can be observed is the relatively recent appearance of ‘tiendas de minutos’ (Cyber-cafes and phone calling stores) in popular settlements; places where literally people connect with ‘the world’. Interestingly enough, these places are converting into meeting points in the barrios (‘nos vemos en la tienda de minutos’, see you in the ‘minutes’ store), as ‘social places for conversation and general conviviality within communities’ (Averweg and Villanueva 2009) and through internet as ‘a window to the world’ where new ideas, trends and traditions would consciously and unconsciously be incorporated into the everyday of the popular settlers lives.

6. Place attachment and a different kind of order

“I love very much my barrio because I have lived many things here, for example the first football championship where I took part. After that, teams always call me to play with them, it was a good fun” (Interview with Rocio, Aguas Claras’ resident, 2008)

As described earlier, there are several actions developed in streets and parks that may indicate connections but also can be interpreted as traces of appropriateness and place attachment. But not only uses of the open space may indicate that, also physical elements and facilities could support this statement. In Danubio, a bit hidden near the main pitch of the park, there is a small cave with a religious statue in it. The cave is closed but flowers can be observed near the statue. A former JAC president built the cave because he wanted to show his beliefs. Park users seem to pay little attention to it, but it has become a landmark within the place; it does not have any practical use (nobody is observed praying in front of it, for example) but it can be argued that has a symbolic significance. Something similar is observed in Aguas Claras, and the topic is also similar: a Catholic church at one end of the main street. It is a small
temporary building, made with zinc sheets. It has a cross in the top and a colourful religious image in the door. It opens only on Sundays for one or two services with a priest who comes from another barrio. The church cannot allocate more than 10 people inside; not many more can be standing near the door and outside. It is not the practical importance of the building what matters, it is the symbolic one. It may be referred to the aspirational journeys described by Kellett (2009) and commented earlier, and it also says something about how people appropriate their own places.

Figure 6: The church in Aguas Claras (source: author)

Figure 7: The cave in Danubio, at one corner of the field (source: author)
Elaborating further on the materiality observed in the barrios, disorder, or a different kind of order, is evident. In both cases the first look at the open spaces means disorder. It is not clear what the borders of the open space are, different level of buildings consolidation reinforces this image, rubbish and untidiness all over the place, deterioration and abandonment of some parts complete the picture. The second look records something different, there is something going on, people are using the spaces, there are some traces of people appropriating of the place, shops, terraces, windows to the space. The first apparent messy image is gradually becoming something interesting, wherever you look, you spot something interesting, a bit unique, different. The third look, the informed one, is very interesting; disorder is not observed any more, but a different kind of order. The community uses and cares for ‘their’ spaces, however, it doesn’t constrain them from making complaints. They are places for community gatherings and events, others for informal meetings with family and friends. There have been the places where many of them have played and spent a significant amount of time of their lives, and for many, it still the case. These spaces are not perfect (in their words) but they are proud of them. There are under construction, very much the same as the barrios themselves. Diversity and a sense of incompleteness is observed, which may be interpreted as a different kind of order; as Lara (2009) suggests: ‘Contrary to the definition of the term informal found in the dictionary..., informal settlements have a formal architectural structure’

The same as other barrios, the use of colours in Aguas Claras and Danubio is intriguing: primary colours especially (blue, red, green and yellow) with dramatic combinations, making some houses standout among the rest. Some other ‘design elements’ such as diamond shapes, flowerbeds, bordering of windows and doors, and front railings (see Kellett 2008) to mention just a few, (see more in Carvajalino Bayona 2004) are evident and make open spaces unique and contribute to the diversity of the environment. The unfinished and loose atmosphere of the borders of the open spaces, the steep topography, the colours and decorations in the facades, the colourful clothes of the washing hanging in windows and terraces, the apparent disorder and untidiness, speak about a ‘special order’ and expressiveness of those places; but how can these be understood? Clues may be found in Garcia Canclini (1989) when he argues that Latin American expressiveness is built upon the modern and the pre-modern, the local and the global, in a sort of culture hybridization. Kellett also offers an explanation arguing that it is a language of aspiration ‘borrowed from dominant groups to which the informal dwellers aspire: a language of order, formality and affluence’ (2009: 5); producing what he calls ‘original copies’.
Relationships between people and place in popular settlements can be also interpreted as ways to make connections; on one hand to the barrio within by means of attachment to the place expressed not only by the functional use, but also the symbolic significance. On the other hand to the city and beyond by means of a language associated with aspirations, different contexts and different times.
7. Conclusions: connections or catching up?

Informal settlements are not only a large portion of Latin American cities, but also a dynamic part of them both in social and physical aspects. These settlements are changing continuously, due to the needs but also to the aspirations of the people. It has been argued in literature that housing has been crucial in those dynamics, undermining role of open spaces; however evidence suggests that they have been tools and products of those changes. Also, it can be argued that these spaces have played a role in integrating the barrios and connecting them to the city. The idea that popular settlements could be ghettos or marginal areas might be no longer the case. They are fully integrated to the city, they are the city; and they also contribute significantly to the open city within.

The role of open spaces in integrating and connecting popular settlements within and beyond can be seen at least in three subjects: in the production, in the use, and in the relation people and place. They have been argued separately in this paper for explanation purposes, but they work intrinsically connected. Popular settlements are largely what people have done of them, both in terms of production and use; therefore a close relationship between the place and the people has been developed. Integration ‘tools’ can be seen since the planning of the settlement, where the orthogonal urban layout, sometimes overriding the logic of the topography, and the early interest of having places and facilities as in the rest of the city; may represent a connection strategy. Transport, economic and internet activities also connect the barrio and the people with the city and beyond, bringing material and immaterial flows in both directions that enrich the already changing and diverse social and physical context. But connections are also seen with traditions and a rural and indigenous past, which also enrich this mixture and may produce new outcomes. Connections are finally seen in traces over the physical environment, in the form and the language. A language that may have been built on imitation and aspirations, but it is clearly related to the people and can be read as an attempt to integrate.

Popular settlements are places ‘of aspiration and change’ (Kellet 2009), where choice and representation can be observed. The richness and creativity that can be found in popular settlements confirm the existence of form and ‘design language’ in these areas: an “aesthetic of the favela” (Berenstein-Jacques cited in Fiori and Brandaq 2009). This language may be interpreted as a hybridization of pre-modern and modern (rural and urban can be included in this category), and local and global, as Garcia Canclini (1989) suggests; also as an imitation
and aspirational journey as Kellett (2009) argues. However, at the end it is an ‘original’ language that deserves being studied further because it represents a large portion of the population, it is ‘common’ and on everyday basis. Mandoki (2001) suggests that expressiveness in daily life is subjected to be studied, that not only the elite forms of communication – the poetic - but also the popular or common ways to express – the prosaic-have aesthetic values. Furthermore, in terms of architecture and urbanism, Fiori and Brandao (2009) observe: ‘... on what are the specific tools of spatial design and urbanism which, informed by the urbanisms of the informal, can contribute to the creation of cities of greater integrity, inclusion and diversity’.

However, we need to be cautions with the interpretations, and understand places as they are and not what they could be or what we think they want to be. In other terms to what Robinson (2006: 1) suggests about understanding cities as ordinary, ‘rather than categorising and labelling cities as, for example, Western, Third World, developed, developing, world or global’ In other words, just how they are, which also applies to informal settlements: ‘The ambition is to explore different tactics for promoting urban development. These would be tactics that release poor cities from imaginative straightjacket of imitative urbanism and the regulating fiction of catching up to wealthier’ (Robinson 2006: 11).

References


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Notes:

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2 Informal or Popular? For the case of this paper, they are used interchangeable; however popular is preferred because in the Colombian context it is better understood, and also helps to avoid the tacit ambiguity between formality and informality.

3 Open spaces in popular settlements are closer to community urban spaces, however, they could be understood a bit differently (where the main use is communal, which is not always the case).
Tejo is a game that can be played in teams (two teams) or individually. It is a traditional rural game from the centre of the country, peasants after having worked the whole week and with money in their pockets, go to play tejo and have several beers.

Metallic rings thrown into the mouth of a metallic frog from the distance.