‘ECOBARRIOS’ IN BOGOTA (COLOMBIA):

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS OF A MAYOR PROGRAMME FROM AN URBAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:
In the last two decades, environmental principles have become increasingly mainstreamed in the urban planning processes and projects of the global south, for example through initiatives concerned with eco-city planning. However, there is still a lack of critical assessments on the implementation, outcomes and impacts of such initiatives, their discourses and practices in this part of the world (Scones 1999; Keil 2005; Rafeq 2006; Veron 2010). Concretely, the following aspects have received less attention: 1) the relationship among ecocities, sustainability and neoliberalism - as the context in which this type of planning is rising; 2) the understanding of the urban condition as a process and product of social, cultural and ecological change; 3) the articulation of environmental concerns with socially inclusive urbanisation; and 4) the consequences of the combination of eco-city and neoliberal enablement market planning in the urban place-making processes (Healey 2000; Swin Eddieog and Heynen 2003; Gunder 2006)

In Bogotá – Colombia, between 2001 and 2003, the Mayor implemented a substantial initiative in this area, the ‘Ecobarrios Programme’ which sought to build sustainable alternatives and individual citizens solutions, in order to “… transform communities into ecological neighborhoods, where the social and environmental welfare could be achieved through changing behaviours, participation and the capacity of individuals to become development agents” (Bogotá’s Mayor Office 2003). Therefore, the objective of the research is to understand the social and cultural impacts of this programme on the place making process of the dwellers of these neighborhoods, after 9 years of implementation, from an urban anthropological perspective.

KEY WORDS:
Eco-city planning; Neoliberal enablement market planning; Ecobarrios; Urban anthropology; Social and cultural impacts; Place making process.
INTRODUCTION

In this paper a general explanation of the topics that are going to be addressed on the lecture at the NAERUS event in Madrid will be presented. The conference has as a goal to present the doctoral research project of an anthropologist that wants to reflect on the city and their current planning challenges from a social and cultural perspective. The aforementioned, in a scenario where in the last Stockholm Memorandum (2011) it was said that we are facing a change of paradigm where it is necessary to re-define development from a social, cultural and environmental perspective.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the last two decades, environmental principles have become increasingly mainstreamed in the urban planning processes and projects of the global south, for example through initiatives concerned with eco-city planning. However, there is still a lack of critical assessments on the implementation, outcomes and impacts of such initiatives, their discourses and practices in this part of the world (Scones 1999; Keil 2005; Rafeq 2006; Veron 2010). Most of the literature in planning for urban sustainability has been engaged with the study of discrete empirical environmental changes which: “...tended to reduce analysis of sustainable urban development to a technical matter of institutional restructuring, traffic management, architectural design and the development of green technologies” (Whitehead 2003: 1187).

Whereby, the following aspects have received less attention: 1) the relationship among ecocities, sustainability and neoliberalism - as the context in which this type of planning is rising; 2) the understanding of the urban condition as a process and product of social, cultural and ecological change; 3) the articulation of environmental concerns with socially inclusive urbanisation (i.e. urban environmental justice Whitehead 2002); and 4) the consequences of the combination of eco-city and neoliberal enablement market planning in the urban place - making processes (Scones 1999; Healey 2000; Swingedouw and Heynen 2003; Keil 2005; Gunder 2006; Rafeq 2006; Veron 2010).

One interesting scenario to address these diverse theoretical and practical gaps expressed above is Bogotá, Colombia’s capital and one of the largest and populated cities in the country. Bogotá has played a key role in the concentration of national productive activities (particularly services), jobs, and capital and in the export of manufactured and agro-industrial products. Between 2003 and 2006 the city GNP grew 10.3% annually, representing the 25% of the national GNP but at the same time has a unemployment index higher of the 20% (Dávila 1996; Rojas and Aristizabal 2004). As a main city in the country Bogotá has been perceived as a: “...constellation of relationships that are constituted by historical and discoursive formations...some of these relations answer to specific government projects that sought to generate practices and changing, dynamic and specific social orders...” (Salcedo y Zimmerman 2008:94). As a result this capital has its own planning history which is directly related with the Colombian context.

Since the 90’s, the neoliberal regime started to be applied in Colombia as a consequence of the policies of President Cesar Gaviria (1990 – 1994). Concretely through the Constitution of 1991 which
established the re-definition of the role of the State, a political decentralization process, a pluralist regime of political parties, foreign investment and the strengthening of citizen rights (i.e. the right to a healthy environment). Also through this instrument some democratic and participatory reforms made in the late 80’s about the citizen control of administrative policies, the legal popular election of Mayors and the creation of local administrative boards were confirmed following the ideals of social justice (Hataya 2010). At the same time the neoliberal paradigm was applied through a group of trade liberalization policies called “economic opening” which encourage for instance private investment in public services and infrastructure.

This scenario affected directly Bogotá planning trajectory. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the city was facing a severe crisis characterized by corruption, poverty, unemployment, insecurity and less access to public services (water and energy). Nevertheless, between 1993 and 2007 with the influence of the market and neoliberal ideals, the Organic Status, the Land Use Plan - based on an environmental vision of the space - and the progressive administration of the following Mayors that allowed a significant level of continuity in the policies and projects that they applied between their mandates; some changes such as the creation of 20 local administrative boards (Juntas de Acción Communal) in order to develop a democratic structure of local administration that would be closer to the community started to emerge.

In addition, in the mid 1990’s semi – private institutions called urban curators (curadurias urbanas) were created in order to issuing development permits based on the Land Use Plan. Sectors such as energy, education, health and communication began to experience a simultaneous process of privatization and decentralization; electricity, telephone and waste collection companies where leave it to the private intervention guided by the market or to the public entities not engaged with the urban policy (Ortiz and Zetter 2004; Gilbert 2008). In addition, a process of infrastructure improvement started since 1998 with the funding of the World Bank.

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1. This type of programmatic election obliged the Mayors to convert the campaign proposal or government programme in development plans that are mandatory.
2. Organic Status – Decree 1421 of 1993, through this one it was dictated the special regime for the capital district of Santafé de Bogotá. Following the article 322 of the Constitution Bogotá city was organized as a capital district having autonomy in the managing of its interests. Furthermore, this political, administrative and fiscal Status had as a purpose to promote the integral development of the territory through participatory processes and the improvement of the quality of life of the inhabitants (Gilbert 2008).
3. Land Use Plan (Plan de Ordenamiento territorial – POT): Through the law 388 of 1997 – Land Use Law – the government obliged all municipalities in Colombia to develop and approved a city ordinance plan before 2000. In compliance of this law Bogotá approved for a ten year period in 2000: “POT introduced the concept of partial that is local plans for public or private initiative, with which the government intends to eliminate the property – by – property development process and instead create an integrated approach to planning localities. As well as their physical planning objectives, the local plans set out the distribution of development responsibilities and benefits between the different landowners and the local authority, including partnership between the sectors (private - public) where appropriate.” (Ortiz and Zetter 2004:190). Through this plan the purpose was to address the city taking into account its metropolitan level and relations with the region and environment (Viviescas 2001).
During this period Mayors initiatives rendered significant improvements in terms of city planning and safety, for example through the implementation of a better public transport system such as Transmilenio. These interventions allowed Bogotá to become regionally and internationally recognized. For instance, in 2002 the UN praised Bogotá as a ‘model city’ because it had change the government system for one more democratic and ethic and also due to some practices like Transmilenio that improve the quality of life of all the citizens becoming an example for other cities. (Gilbert and Dávila 2001; Gilbert and Garcés 2008)

At that moment (1993 – 2007), one of the most surprising elections was the Antanas Mockus one, because he was not part of any traditional - political party, but instead an independent candidate (Gilbert and Garcés 2008). During his two periods as Mayor (1995 – 1998 and 2001 – 2003) in order to turn Bogotá in a competitive city he introduced substantial changes such as the development of civic culture - that was the basis of his policies and programmes -, the implementation of a participatory budget and the need to encourage the sustainability of the city’s environment.

This was accomplished through his development plans “Build City - For the City that we want” (“Formar Ciudad – Por la Bogotá que Queremos” 1995 – 1998) that had an objective to achieve a deep change in the citizens way of life, transforming Bogota in a more competitive city through its economic, social and cultural progress in partnership with the private sector (Bogotá’s Mayor Office 1998). “Bogotá: to Live all in the Same Side” (“Bogotá: para Vivir todos del mismo Lado” 2001 – 2003) was the other plan that created a new meaning of public management. The purpose of this one was the beautification the city in terms of infrastructure and environment; to make it more attractive to investors, economically competitive and effective in its administrative management. Also the aim of this plan was to built collectively a social and inclusive city having human beings and culture as the main axes of this one (Administrative Department of Community Action 2004).

One of the programmes developed during his second mandate (2001 – 2003) was Ecobarrios (roughly translated in English as ‘Ecological neighbourhoods’) defined as “… a group or community that with a long term vision get organized in order to improve their quality of life and to achieve their social and environmental welfare in a sustainable urban context” (Bogotá’s Mayor Office 2003: 2). The prefix eco comes from the Greek word oikos which means home, therefore an ecobario is define as a neighbourhood- home; also it is conceived as an ecological neighbourhood: “...where a community decide to live in harmony with their surrounding, respecting the relationships between the humans and the other living beings” (Bogotá’s Mayor Office 2003:3). Following the assumptions of an ecovillage (Gilman 1991), these neighborhoods take into account four dimensions in order to transform Bogotá in a sustainable and ecological city: environmental, social, economic and human (spiritual).

The main goal of the programme was to build sustainable alternatives and individual citizens solutions that could:

“... transform communities into ecological neighborhoods, where the social and environmental welfare could be achieved through changing behaviours, participation and the capacity of individuals to become development agents” (Bogotá’s Mayor Office 2003:2).
In this context, the Mayor worked with two loans from the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank in order to “…strengthen the community based organizations and to promote their role as integral development agents from our city” (Bogota’s Mayor 2002:3) Concretely, as part of a democratic and decentralizing process, the programme was interested in the empowerment of the individuals and communities through bottom up strategies, in order to give them the opportunity to identify their own problems, solutions and alternatives to development through their agency and democratic and participative planning. Hence, through the training of citizen and community leaders in social and labour skills with the funding of the public and private sector the objective was to contribute to the competitiveness of the city (Administrative Department of Community Action 2004).

In order to do this the methodology implemented by the Administrative Department of Community Action (DAACD)\(^5\) was to open a process of projects submission where community based organizations (CBOs) had the opportunity to present their initiatives taking into account their own problems and solutions. During 2001 these projects were developed taking into account each Ecobarrios dimension, while in 2002 and 2003 the projects integrated the four aforementioned dimensions and where implemented through six action lines, namely: strengthening and coexistence, environment, productivity, culture, sports and communication. By the end of this process (December 2003) 143 neighborhoods were part of the programme. Although in 2003 Ecobarrios programme was stopped because the Mayor changed, some of the neighborhoods kept working on their initiatives until today (2011) while others did not.

In addition, other scenario emerged from this process: since 2009 three neighborhoods of one of the localities that were part of ecobarrios (Manantial, Corintio and Triangulo medio – Localidad de San Cristobal Sur) have been trying to avoid their resettlement. The inhabitants realized through a geological study that was funding by CINEP (an NGO) that not all that area was under risk. The result of this study was different from the Mayor’s research according to which one all the area where they were leaving was under high risk. Nowadays (2011), the proposal of the community of these neighborhoods is to try to locate the people in the areas that are not under risk and at the same time to implement Ecobarrios in order to improve their living conditions, because they believe that the resettlement policies fail improving or at least keeping their living standards [fig.1].

\(^5\) Hereafter, DAACD Spanish acronym.
‘Ecobarrios’ in Bogota (Colombia): Understanding Social and Cultural Impacts of a Mayor Programme from an Urban Anthropological Perspective

Therefore, considering the aforementioned context and the fact that this programme has not been analyzed until today (2011), the purpose of this research is to understand what happened when the dwellers of specific neighbourhoods were exposed to the designed and implementation of Ecobarrios; specifically, what were the effects in terms of the production of the urban social space from a social and cultural perspective. For this aim, the space and its continuous (re)production will be considered as an historical product (social, political and ideological) where urban spaces are conceived, perceived and lived through daily life and social relations (and decisions) of people (as agents) and their co-production with nature. This process of space production is characterized of a constant dynamic of negotiation and contestation, where dominant ideological and planning positions are reproduced but at the same time alternative perspectives are practiced (Lefebvre 1991; Escobar 2000).

Hence, one part of the analysis will be focused on the planning perspective, related with the political and ideological dimension of the space in order to have a better understanding of the effects of this programme. The goal will be to comprehend the type of planning hybrid that this project was, it was an eco-city initiative with market-led influences? or really it was a greening market – led project? or instead it was a eco-city proposal against neoliberal and market – led assumptions? All this will be addressed among other things, taking into account the discursive categories of participation, empowerment, community based organization and sustainable development in order to understand if they were really applied in practice as part of a progressive programme in the name of social justice and environment conservation or instead they where co-opted being used as a smokescreen in the name of an entrepreneurial management of the city.
The second and main part of the analysis will be focused in the understanding of the effects in the social domain of this case. This implies to understand how the dwellers appropriated, applied, used or rejected this programme in their daily life affecting the production of their social space generating changes (i.e re-signifying their practices and discourses) or permanences (avoiding change) in this process. In order to evaluate this anthropological places are going to be take into account which means that within the city - as a macro space where is an association among ideologies, institutions and power and control mechanisms like policies – the local meaningful contexts are going to be related with that places that from an anthropological perspective allow to analyze how the social actors react, assume or resist to these policies, plans and programmes. Then, within these anthropological places the impacts on the social practices (daily and non daily), social and power relations (humans – humans, humans – nature, humans – things, humans – socially built space and territory) and social bonds (friendship, vicinity, community) of the social agents of these neighborhoods are going to be analyzed (Escobar 2000; Cucó 2004).

The aforementioned analysis will be developed within the realm of urban anthropology where three approaches are going to be used: interpretativism, post-structuralism and actor oriented perspective. Their definition and explanation will be held in the theoretical framework (chapter 2) of this document.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

**GENERAL**

To analyze the social and cultural impacts of the process and outcomes / outputs of the Ecobarrios programme on the place-making process of the dwellers of these neighborhoods.

**SPECIFICS**

1) To understand the type of “planning hybrid” that this Ecobarrios programme (implemented in a context where market–led influences) was.

2) To comprehend the social and cultural effects of the designed and implementation of Ecobarrios programme on the anthropological places, daily and non daily social practices and social relations and bonds of the diverse actors in these neighborhoods.

3) To explore the extent to which this programme (as a trigger) has influenced participating grassroots actor’s perceptions as “citizens with rights”, developing empowerment dynamics at the community level.
RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Taking into account that this is an exploratory research from an anthropological and hermeneutic perspective where social phenomena are going to be analyzed and interpreted, it is not recommended to establish previous hypotheses. Nevertheless, some possible results could be suggested during the presentation.

RELEVANCE

Regarding the relevance of this study in a scenario where in the last Stockholm Memorandum (2011) it was said that it is necessary to further develop thinking in the definition of urban development from a social and cultural perspective, the following are some important considerations: First, there is a need in urban studies (urban political ecology) and urban anthropology to develop researches that analyze the social and cultural impacts of planning programmes in the production of social space. Second, it is useful to show how the anthropological perspective could be useful to designed, implement and evaluate urban planning programmes, policies and plans. Third, this study provides the author (an anthropologist that wants to work in urban development) with the possibility to develop or adjust analytical and methodological anthropological tools through a reflexive process of the theoretical practice itself (Aguilar 2003). Fourth, this study represents a first attempt to evaluate the Ecobarrios programme since its inception in 2001, with an emphasis on social and cultural aspects which will provide specific and unique information that could be useful for future initiatives. Fifth, the present study will be used as a pilot project to create a new line of research on City and Development at Erigaie Foundation, entity in which the researcher works. Erigaie conducts and encourages research on Culture, Environment preservation, Community Development and Spaces and Representation for Urban related aspects.

METHODOLOGY

In order two addressed the objectives of this study a postmodern and interpretative ethnography will be developed. For that reason the fieldwork will be focused on the micro-scale of the place making and social and urban process but in a holistic perspective (which in this case means within the macro-scale of the urban phenomena) taking into account the dwellers, their power and social relations, links, discourses, practices (daily and non-daily), meaningful contexts and anthropological places. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the accomplishment of this kind of ethnography implies a reflexive type of understanding of the social process which means that the ethnographer is conscious of its own context and that this one is going to influence the research (how the person – the positionality – of the researcher might have shaped the research process) (Guber 2004) The methods and techniques that are going to be applied during the fieldwork in Bogota - Colombia are going to be explained in detail during the conference always relate them with the objectives of the investigation.

In order to analyze and interpret the collected information a discursive analysis is going to be applied. This method will be achieved in order to analyze the types of planning behind Ecobarrios programme, their relations and also to determine and analyze: 1) the categories used to make reference to Ecobarrios and the practices that are related with these categories in the documents; 2) This with the purpose to compare that information with the data collected (discursive categories and practices) from
the ethnographic exercise to understand until what point the categories and practices used and explained in the documents were and are appropriated and put into practice by the people from those neighborhoods. Concretely, to analyze how and until what point the discursive practices from this programme affected the place making processes of the actors of these neighborhoods.

This analysis is going to be made using tools such as the Atlas ti⁶ that helped to interpret data taking into account the theoretical framework and also to generate new categories or redefine the previous ones from the collected data. Atlas ti will allow the schematic and conceptual organization of the discursive categories and the information obtained in the bibliographic review, the participatory observation and the interviews.

REFERENCES


⁶ Atlas ti is an informatics tool, a method that makes easier the qualitative analysis and the interpretation of textual information, video files, images and sound (Muñoz 2005).


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