

# **Advancing against violence in Bogotá**

Creating Civic Agency and “Cultural Change”: The Case of Bogotá

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Bogotá has been successful in fighting violence in the last decade. Some aspects of this fight are considered here. Even if the story could be seen as unique, some lessons can be learned. The public consciousness regarding violence was transformed, rendering violence morally and culturally unacceptable. At the same time, moral self-satisfaction and social recognition even for just being dutiful were promoted. The fight against violence became part of a fight for harmony between personal morality, social norms and the law. This harmony consists of moral and cultural refusal of illegal actions, and moral and cultural approval of legal obligations<sup>1</sup>.

## **The transformation of the public consciousness regarding violence**

In the last ten years, a lot of things have changed in Bogotá. Among them, the way violence is perceived and rejected. Violence is seen as evil (public consciousness regarding violence was transformed rendering violence morally and culturally unacceptable). Violence is seen as a generator of more violence (this is a pragmatic, - cognitive, rejection). Violence is not culturally celebrated, and is not welcomed (there is a generalized implicit social rejection and some people make this rejection public).

The state's legal use of force is now both more legitimate and legally bounded. Restrictions on the means employed are progressively seen as a source of authority. Self-

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<sup>1</sup> This harmony is compatible with moral and cultural pluralism, assuming the existence and acceptance of communicative and democratic ways of processing tensions between law and morals or law and culture.

defense with guns is less accepted; self-justice seems to be also non justifiable for the majority of people (even if there is lack of confidence in justice). Violence is part of methods that are considered by a lot of people as unacceptable.

Peaceful solution of conflicts has been promoted both as an institutional task and through training of community leaders. This has taught us that in the face of aggressions or demeanors, the alternative is not just between resignation and violence: there are more ways to respond.

Perhaps the most interesting change is that citizens feel co responsible (as illustrated by the very peaceful use of a red card as a means for car drivers and other citizens correcting small traffic offences, and by the percentages of citizens that when facing transgressions, attempt to peacefully correct the demeanor).

Finally, citizens, involved in this process of personal self-control and mutual social regulation, and who have accepted that the city's government can have a pedagogical agenda aimed at bettering some of the citizen's behavior.

Objective assessment of results shows strong improvements in life protection. There has been a clear reduction of the homicide rate, from 80 for each 100.000 inhabitants in 1993 to 22 for each 100.000 inhabitants in 2003. Transit accident fatalities have dropped down from an average of 1300 per year in the early nineties to about 600 per year. It seems to me that citizens feel they are co responsible of these good results.

Avoiding violence has been a big collective task, in which very different institutions and citizens have co-operated. The City's Security Council adopted an epidemiological approach (made available in the Colombian context by a mayor of Cali by 1993-94) and the use of unified and revised global statistics and progressively detailed analysis of space and time characteristics and other risk factors linked to crime data. To some extent, this approach has helped to build up an anti-violence barrier in strong consonance with the Colombian Constitution: homicides between criminals are as problematic and unacceptable as other homicides. "Todos tenemos remedio" (we all have a way to rebuilding our lives). Technical means have been put in place without destroying pedagogical and religious optimism. Public health approach was also patent in the

building of the “vaccine against violence”. 45.000 people participated in two journeys, strengthening the public awareness about prevention and attention of violence in the family and in sexual offenses.

## **Lessons learned about involvement of citizens and governmental activism**

### **Lessons about pedagogy and governmental action**

First, clearly governance and pedagogy can intertwine, and they can do so in at least three different ways:

1. Governmental action can be directly pedagogical. This would mean pedagogical intention, goals and means; also pedagogical intentional remake of means, originally not pedagogical (for example government assuming legal punishment as a last option instead of a first one). Perhaps the most critical question is: what gives to government agents a pedagogical authority? On what grounds do you have the right to teach<sup>2</sup>? A partial answer is that you can only teach if you have had, and still have, the opportunity to learn.
2. People and media can themselves “reinterpret” governmental actions as pedagogical ones.
3. Governmental action can have pedagogical by-products. Even if these are difficult to reproduce at will, they can be recognized and appreciated. Public policies cannot reach the stability and the cooperation they usually need without being understood to some extent by diverse social actors in very different contexts

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<sup>2</sup> Some qualified critics (such as Juan Carlos Flórez, a History professor at the Andes University) characterized the City’s government in the period 1995-97, as a “pedagogical authoritarianism”. He could be arguing specifically against the use of pedagogical justifications for validating freedom restrictions (such as the alcohol selling prohibition after one o’clock in the morning) and not so much against the pedagogical intentions. In 1995, after a short episode of traffic control made by mimes, 86% of the city’s adults declared being well disposed to learn if they were taught by mimes.

(public policies are transformed by a “re-contextualization” process<sup>3</sup>). Any public policy should have assessable pedagogical by-products.

The experience can generate –as it seems to me is happening in Bogotá– a new function for the mayors: they have to have a pedagogical agenda. A Citizenship Culture survey has been applied two times (end 2001 and end 2003) and shows growth of disapproval of gun carrying as a mean of self defense and clear reductions in practical and cultural justifications of illegal behavior.

Indicator	2001	2003
% of citizens to whom disobey the law is justified when it is the only way to reach the objectives	24.1%	17.3%
% of citizens to whom disobey the law is justified when it is the custom	8.9%	6.6%
% of citizens to whom disobey the law is justified when it pays well economically	11.8%	7.5%
% of citizens to whom disobey the law is justified when someone considered exemplar in his behavior has done so	7.5%	6.9%

<sup>3</sup> A concept originated in the work of Basil Bernstein about pedagogy and cultural reproduction. Córdoba, Adriana, *Entre planeación y gestión gubernamental: recontextualización* [Between planning and government action: re-contextualization], Trabajos de Grado Cider 4, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, 2003.

## Lessons about openness

When you compare “cultura ciudadana” (Citizenship Culture) actions, goals and results, with more standard ways of influencing some beliefs and behaviors, as publicity (in the sense of advertising) or pedagogy, you can conclude:

1. Advertising doesn't guarantee the stability of the changes. Pedagogy should be in some sense irreversible (especially in matters of every day practice).
2. Society can strongly reject too much investment in state advertising, even if it is made for the sake of noble goals.
3. Free press is better than “calculated” free press which is generally better than advertising.
4. Non foreseen situations emerge and generate new agenda (as the water supply emergency in 1997, that trained citizens in self-control of water consumption<sup>4</sup>, or the peaceful strike of taxi drivers in august 2002, because of mistrust of a shift system as response to excess of available transport). Practical knowledge of water fare structure resulted in a permanent reduction of average family's consumption from 28 to 17 cubic meters by month. The shift system in public transport is now accepted and the productivity raised (and we have in our cultural repertory a striking case of unjustified rejection of productivity).
5. People like incomplete messages: they have in their hands the power to complete the message in different ways. Several times, the mayor was at high risk of being symbolically derogated (as excessively irreverent, as ridiculous, as incomprehensible) and his fate depended on decantation of the sense of what finally had happened. Many times his message was clearly re-elaborated, bettered or completed by the public.

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<sup>4</sup> Economical incentives for individuals only become visible empirically through the water-saving collective action.

6. Another way of looking to openness is accepting that political capital (as other forms of capital) is not to be treasured but reinvested.

### **Lessons about citizenship**

From the very beginning of documents about “cultura ciudadana” citizenry was thought as built in to both relations: between unknown persons, and between these and the state institutions. “Ya tengo cédula” (Now I have an ID) a homeless person shouted with joy to me one night out in the street. Today the attention to citizens in the offices of the city and in the water, telephone and electricity companies, is more careful and respectful (for instance, more than 55% of people without bank accounts spent typically one and a half hours paying water, telephone and electricity services; now they spend from 5 to 30 minutes).

In Bogotá, citizens freely vote, judge governmental discourse and actions, and claim for actions and results. “¡Yo voté por usted, yo veré! (I voted for you, now lets see!). Some times in the second term, journalists and citizens demanded more innovation and more pedagogical agenda. The response to terrorist actions by attitudes and actions of civil resistance and actions proposed by third parties (for example drawing 1500 stars on the roads where pedestrians had been killed by cars in the last five years, or as the all night shopping on the last weekend before Christmas) and the permanent action of *Misión Bogotá* (a program of rehabilitation where petty criminals and border-line persons are trained and employed as civic guides teaching people to obey the law in transport stations and street traffic) helped quite a lot to respond to the citizens’ demand.

Another face of citizenry building is what we call “tributary culture”. In 2002, 63.000 persons, households or enterprises voluntarily paid 10% more taxes (fundamentally real estate taxes). In 2003, even after a local and national raise in tariffs and bases of taxes, 46.000 did so. In fact, in the two elections I won, I did so after announcing new taxes. The pedagogical objective was linking social policy and infrastructure development and maintenance with the payments by the citizens. Of course, our initiative and public debate obliged us to *also* work on the issues of austerity and elusion reduction. In 1990,

Bogotá received 200 millions US dollars in local taxes, in 2003 it received 750. This is also a symptom of trust.

Building on the 30 years of experience of the “Ciclovía” (1’600.000 bikes on avenues closed to cars seven hours every Sunday and on holidays), big integration rituals have been assumed as important pedagogical opportunities. The car free day is 13 hours across the whole city and compulsory, established by popular vote in year 2000.

External assessment of the effectiveness of the government in reaching the goals of the development plan has been made in the last 6 years by *Bogotá cómo vamos*, an alliance of the Chamber of Commerce, the biggest Colombian newspaper and a private sector-sponsored high profile NGO.

These are perhaps effective ways of building citizenry, even if they do not correspond to the (romantic?) ideal of a civil society strongly linked by networks of small voluntary organizations. Membership to voluntary organizations has been dropping, especially in the middle and upper classes (from 1997 to 2001 and then again in 2003). These networks exist and are part of the social and physical rebuilding of the city, but state and media are also highly relevant.

Important investments in improving public space, public libraries, special roads for bikes (227 km) and pedestrians, have helped to celebrate citizen’s identity and to fix some norms.

Anti-clientelism (rights, not favors) is not just embedded in Colombian Constitution and laws: during my two terms in office, a strong independence between the city’s executive and the Council promoted an acid political control and made possible decisions based on debate.

### **Challenges for the mobilization of Colombians**

Big challenges remain. How much of what Bogotá has learned has also been useful for the whole of the country, or at least for its bigger cities, remains an open question.

Anyway, Cultura Ciudadana as approach, or some actions inspired in it, have been present in political discourse and in local government work in different towns (even very

small ones). It is accepted that generally, the decentralization process has improved opportunities of innovation and horizontal dissemination.

The interdependence of rationality and emotions can perhaps help to understand the intertwining of (and in a prudent sense reproducible) episodes of rational government action, collective actions that involve citizens cooperation and a more general narrative.

One example: generally Bogotá was not beloved by its citizens. In 1997 we proposed, and incorporated in the citizen's red card, the slogan "Bogotá coquette" (with the implicit recognition of its ugliness). Being "coquette" is a way out for ugly persons. Four years after, Bogotá is recognized by inhabitants (and by visitors who did know it in the past) as pretty, good-looking, and even to some extent a beautiful city. (In effect, in my first term, Bogotá sold half of its energy company to international private investors for US 2.600 millions overcapitalizing it; afterwards, capital reductions generated about 700 million US dollars for the city, a sum that in combination with fiscal good managing made huge urban investments possible). Bogotá ugly, Bogotá coquette and Bogotá beautiful became a possible narrative. In general, changes in citizens and government behavior preceded physical changes.

The efforts and the results in social policies have also been good (i.e. more than 300.000 new people subsidised for public health attention, 87.000 new places in public schools, improvements in water and in sewage access, reduction in child evitable mortality, 5.300 new places for first age education of poor families, augmentation in attention to very vulnerable population: 22.000 elders, 49.000 very poor people, 4.900 homeless people, 12.000 people displaced from a very deteriorated neighborhood that is being replaced by a park). Even if these results perhaps have not been sufficiently divulged, now the city is going towards a Bogotá both beautiful and socially just. In the words of the newly elected Mayor, in position from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004: "A modern and humane Bogotá".

The rational agenda in matters like the urgent reduction of fiscal deficit and the strengthening of justice and of the rule-of-the-law, has possibly more chances of success if accompanied with a pedagogical agenda, that should be strongly grounded to Colombian constitutional principles. Arts and culture (in the more narrow sense of

professional activity), should be helpful in maintaining openness and helping to build trust by making visible the forces and the advances both in communities and in collective actions. A theatre group, Mapa Teatro, set up some collective events to elaborate the memory of a community of homeless people and those who recycle trash for a living. Both the program “Misión Bogotá” and the “Prometeo” gave a lot of us a strong feeling of “we are constituting ourselves as citizens, we are not condemned to violence, our hope is based on the certainty that everybody can rekindle”. (I have had the opportunity, until now).

Acceptation of a sort of pedagogical frame has contributed to a patient compliance, especially at the beginning, with some innovations (like a 40% restriction on private car use) that were an important part of the public policy of discouraging private car use, for transportation and ecological reasons. In a first phase, innovation is accepted as a pedagogical activity, in a second phase, practical results afford stability.

### **What would be needed to transform relations between citizenry and the government in the face of violence?**

The construction of a shared citizen’s ideal contributes to self and mutual restraint in the face of the temptation to use violence, and contributes to have trust in the legitimate action of the State. Thus it would be good to continue in that direction (new Mayors, including those of Medellín and Bogotá, have announced their compromise).

The construction of bridges with other local processes has begun. For example, in 2003 a national and international meeting about civil resistance took place, where six Indian and six small community’s experiences were presented. Indians have a strong communitarian tradition and clear constitutional grounds for building up their autonomy, their self-regulation. They also have the advantage of a long-term time frame. Peasants and other small town inhabitants have built up innovations that put democratic procedures for taking decisions in the center of the local life (i.e. a local Constituent Assembly). This was intended for giving higher moral and social authority to civilians in the conversations and negotiations with illegal local groups and, in some cases, for building up creative

ways to assure economical survival. This kind of new institutional creation can generate, in some cases, tensions with legal common order, tensions that should be addressed.

Bogotá's experience in civil resistance includes the general slogan "In the face of destruction, construction" (or the shorter one "For Bogotá, construction"), public manifestations of protest against terrorist aggressions, the divulging of International Humanitarian Laws on internal conflicts, public denouncement to justice, public invitation to violent rebel groups to participate in ideological debates, pre-commitments against silence, against leaving jobs or fleeing the country and against submitting to extortion and kidnapping. Other initiatives weren't as successful: for instance, a cultural fight against the stigmatization of denouncers or witnesses was searched through the promotion of "croactivity" (an expression created for communicative pro-activity), so called because the Colombian equivalent of "snitch" is "sapo" (frog), but it was not easily received. A "culture of lawfulness" curriculum is being adapted and experimented with ninth graders by 10 teachers in Bogotá and 20 in Medellín.

Generally speaking, to find a shorter and less costly way to help peace in Colombia would be: (1) activities that enhance a strong cultural disapproval of violence and that respond immediately with energy to the worst cases of violence, (2) activities that develop a taste for democratic practices and activities and (3) continuing building of citizenry and citizen's identity.

As part of the country continues to tolerate open and cynical illegal activities, it's very important to build a moral and cultural disapproval of those activities. Just enforcement will not be sufficient<sup>5</sup>. Citizen's duties, like helping justice, have to become morally and socially approved. Public agreements, like those used in the "integrity processes" around

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<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that law enforcement isn't important. The traditionally corrupted local transit police was dissolved beginning 1996 in my first term and replaced by National Police members better trained, more controlled and more trusted. In Bogotá the number of short-term arrests (less than 24 hours) for verification of identity and antecedents was multiplied by four during the last ten years. A general pedagogical context (perhaps) has helped to make more efficient these kinds of legal changes and sanctions.

big state contracts, could be of help. Incentives towards legal economy enhancing, cannot be accepted as a condition, but they could be a factor towards success.

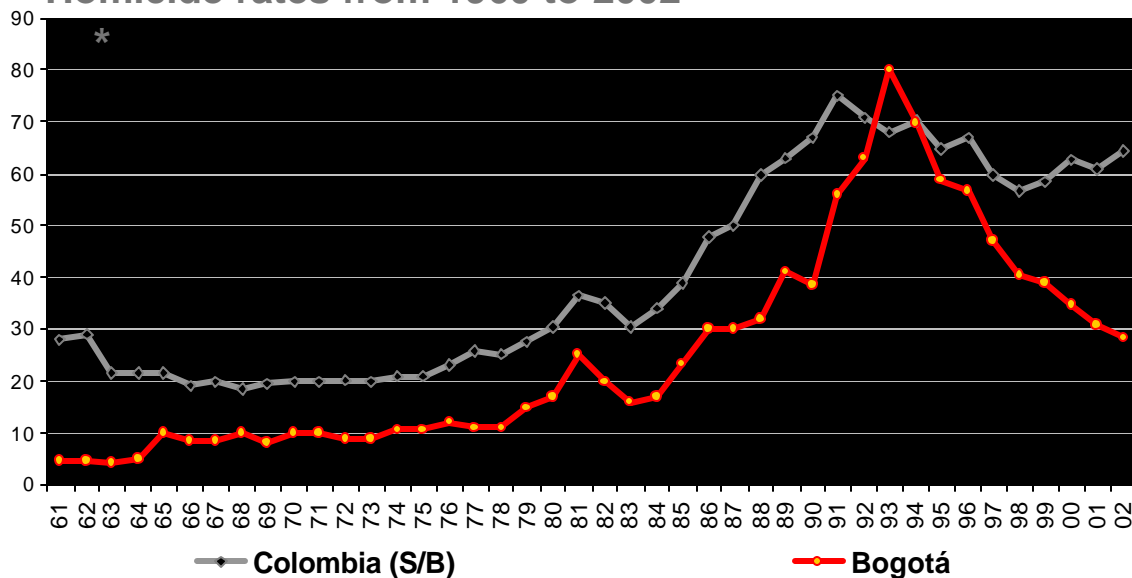
Sincerity, pedagogical frame, accountability and citizen's identity should be promoted at the country level, both by Colombian official institutions and by private or third sector organizations. As I have tried to illustrate, the crucial gap between some laws and some social norms can be reduced through ways alternative or complementary to law enforcement.

Some of these ways should also be recognized as important issues for American society.

Bogotá, January 14, 2004.

## Protection of life

### Homicide rates from 1960 to 2002



Source: National Institute of Forensics