Una Ciudad de Contrastes
(A city of contrasts)

Public Space and Architecture Between Gated Communities and the Informally Developed City.

Case Study: Bogotá, Colombia.

Eduardo José Zambrano Villamizar

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To my new friends in Torino, whose presence made this a fun and valuable experience. To Giancarlo, who was the final push in the decision to come here, and a constant support.

To Bogotá.

A las personas que me apoyan desde la distancia. A mi hermana, Gaby, por ser mi modelo a seguir; a mi padre, Eduardo, por su apoyo y sus consejos; Giulia, per essere lo più importante che mi è successo qua. Y por último, a mi madre, Xiomara, no hay palabras que le hagan justicia a los agradecimientos que te mereces, podrían ser una tesis por sí misma.

Abstract

Gated communities have been the largely studied due to their effect on urban development and the social dynamics around them. In recent years, efforts have focused on understanding how this model was replicated worldwide and the how it adapts to different local contexts. This is the case of Bogotá, where, in despite of new regulations trying to prevent the construction of enclaves inside the city, it continues to be the main housing typology under development.

At the same time, Bogotá, like many of the cities in global south, grew largely through informal development, with self-built neighborhoods emerging in the peripheries and slowly being absorbed by the city. Most of the research surrounding gated communities in Bogotá is focused on their emergence, their direct effect on the city and security, and how they became a universal housing solution throughout the city and the country. However, in several parts of the city, these enclaves sit right next to informally developed neighborhoods, creating a visible contrast between two very different ways of building and living in the city.

This thesis explores the spatial and social dynamics in the areas where they encounter. Aiming to better understand the physical and social divisions that emerge, and investigate how urban design and architecture can mediate the threshold in between these contrasting realities.

The research is structured in five chapters, the first is a theoretical and contextual framework looking into the global emergence and local translations of gated communities. The second gives a general insight on the global phenomenon of informal settlements, and provides a whole-city analysis on Bogotá's particularities regarding both typologies and its general patterns of segregation, arriving to the conclusion that socio-economic differences, although largely present in the whole city, are not necessarily universal to every place where both typologies meet. The third is a case-study analysis on interventions focusing on urban and social division through design, highlighting strategies that address enclosure, public space, and participation. The fourth chapter is an in-depth analysis that centers on a specific site in the north periphery of the city where both urban forms converge, with a historical, morphological, and social analysis. Based on that investigation and the strategies explored in the third chapter, the fifth presents a design proposal that aims to reclaim open spaces currently acting as barriers, transforming them into shared public spaces that intend to open gated communities to their surroundings, and provide public space and infrastructure for the informally developed neighborhoods.

Rather than trying to erase the differences between these two urban forms, this thesis seeks to recognize the challenges and values of each, exploring how they can complement each other to create a more connected and inclusive city.

Index

Introduction

Urban informality was the first idea guiding the formulation of the research question for this thesis. The idea of understanding and giving value to the self-organization that requires developing a city with the bare hands of the people arriving in it, and the spatial and social dynamics that emerge in that process was the focus in an early literature review conducted with the hope of giving direction to the investigation.

In an article written by Felipe Mesa (2022), the concept of permeability arose in his analysis of Medellín, where, because of the topography and social inequalities inside the city, became an "assemblage of contrastingly different urban zones". In a very general summary, the self-built and informally developed neighborhoods, more predominant in the north, vary largely from the enclosed free-standing housing towers in the high-class areas in the south. Permeability gained relevance as those northern neighborhoods (aside from their evident social issues) permitted a more dynamic urban life in comparison to the enclaves in the south that, in despite of their amenities and more open space, reinforce a private, rigid, and closed way of living.

Evidently, this situation is not unique of Medellín, as these gated communities have existed for a long time, and its large number of variations also share the space with diverse urban realities depending on the context where they emerge. In the capital of Colombia, Bogotá, the socio-economic contrast between the north and south is widely recognized by its residents, but a closer look reveals that is a city of patches, where gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods meet in various points, and these in-between spaces act differently depending on the specific area of the encounters.

Bogotá becomes a relevant case-study as gated communities became in the last three decades the mainly produced housing typology in the city, and due to their success as a product, they are no longer just for the high-class and the privileged, but also the main solution for social housing, adapting to every socio-economic class. At the same time, the informal city, mostly emerging before the boom of the private enclaves, continues to exist with their cooperation dynamics, flexibility, and adaptability.

Informality is to this day perceived under a negative lens, ignoring that it is in many cases the only solution for many people. In recent decades, at least regarding informal settlements, there has been a shift, and the values that self-building has in developing a sense of community and identity, in addition to being a practical solution for vulnerable populations, are recognized. Gated communities, on the other side, although not necessarily being perceived as negative by the people outside the fields of urban planning or architecture, have gained relevance for their effects on urban life, typically seen as a harmful way of making city.

The aim of the thesis is to understand these urban forms, their differences, the dynamics of the areas where they encounter, and exploring strategies to work on the permeability between them, following the research question: How can the spatial thresholds between gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods be reimagined as opportunities for connection and shared urban life?

To achieve this the thesis will start with a literature review on the historical development, worldwide manifestations, and Bogotá's particularities regarding gated communities and informal settlements. Through the selection of a study area inside the city some strategies will be suggested and exemplified with the aim of contributing to a framework that promotes a better-connected city.

# Gated Communities

1.1 Overview of gated communties

General definition and characteristics of the gated communities

Without an agreed definition on what the term actually constitutes, the gated communities are an urban, architectonic, and socioeconomic phenomenon that have been the target of numerous discussions and analysis. At the beginning of their book on the topic, Bagaeen and Uduku (2010, page 1), referencing different authors, draw from some commonly mentioned elements: the restriction of public access and privatization of public space through the use of gates, fences or walls; the presence of security staff and permanent monitoring; the offering of services and leisure facilities; the specific acceptable conducts and behaviors; and the responsibilities that the residents have to agree to regarding the administration and maintenance of the communal property.

These traits offer only a general overview of the topic; to gain a clearer understanding of these features and the global spread of contemporary gated communities, it becomes relevant to look back at their origins, identifying the social, economic, and political motives that shaped their evolution into the diverse forms seen today. This analysis will help clarify the particularities of Latin America and Bogotá, leading to a more precise definition of gated communities concerning the study area.

Historical evolution and global expansion

Gating is not a new concept, fortifying as a means for protection and defense is largely globally precedented. In ancient and medieval times cities would often have walls protecting them from external threats. Feudal castles and towns in the UK could be interpreted as precursors to present-day gating (Blandy, 2006); traditional Chinese residences were built around closed courtyards, which also scaled to the cities, the Forbidden City being one of the typical examples (Wu, 2005); due to conflict, slave raiding, and the need of protection from large mammals, by the 1900 almost every village and town in the sub-Saharan Africa had some form of enclosure (Denyer, 1978). Apart from a defense strategy, physical barriers have also been used for political purposes, dividing people by race or beliefs as a way of
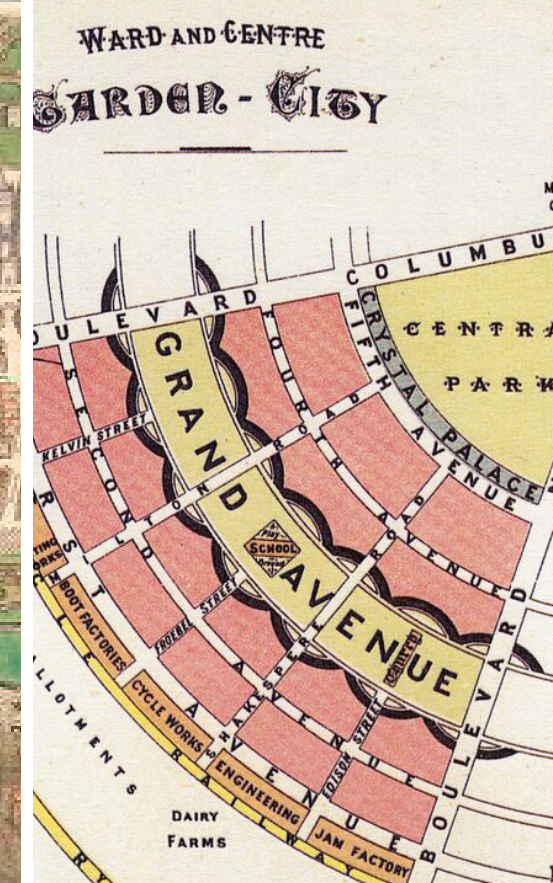
exercising power and control over the population (Bagaeen, 2010).

Regarding western evolution, Europe has seen multiple cases of the wealthy using barriers to protect and exclude themselves from the rest of the population (Low, 2001; Blakely and Snyder, 1997). By the 19th century, with the pacification that contributed to the formation of nation-states, urban spaces became more open and developed, however they would still be contested and dominated by certain more affluent classes (Goheen, 2004). Some of the early displays of the modern fortified enclave would appear in North America and Europe as residential retreats for the wealthy in the 19th century, a trend that would continue towards the 20th century with the continued use of private streets as refuge for the growing middle class (Grant, 2008).

In the late 19th century, Ebenezer Howard introduced in his publication "To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform the concept of Garden-city", which would become one the main influences of the early modern urban planning. Under the context of overcrowding, sanitary issues, and poor housing conditions that most industrial cities had, he proposed self-sustained communities surrounded by green spaces, independent from the rest of the cities, combining the advantages of rural living with the possibilities found in the city (Hall, 2000).

Although the idea had good reception its actual implementation was limited due to practical and economic reasons, still some projects such as Letchworth (1903) and later Welwyn Garden City (1920) were developed in England following the concept, but in its spread in England and towards North America, an alternative known as garden suburbs found its place, providing housing with open green spaces but still dependent on the large cities. This led to the development of Satellite Towns; meant to absorb population overflow and economic activity, smaller urban centers were built around the central metropolis (Chatterjee & Chattopadhyay, 2020). This model, complemented with the car-centered planning in the United States shaped its later suburbanization sprawl (Hall, 2000). Despite its inspiration in the ideas by Howard, the U.S. experiments became elitist due to high land cost and building prices, and with the zoning laws and housing policies prevailing in the postwar period these suburbs became places of racial and economic exclusion (Schubert, 2000).

Another side of history

While the history of gating until the half of the 20th century is often told through examples in the US and Europe, from the classical and medieval precedents to suburbanization and modernist ideas like functional zoning, high-rise housing, and separation of pedestrians and vehicles, there are other ways in which this evolution has taken place. Two interesting cases are China, due to its relative isolation and reject towards direct western influence; and the Philippines, due to its colonial past.

In China, before the Communist Revolution in 1949, gating was not common. Although industrialization and Western influence started creating more social and spatial divisions within cities, most neighborhoods remained open. The more "exclusive" areas were usually defined by distance rather than physical barriers (Wu, 2005). After the revolution, a severe housing shortage and lack of funding led to overcrowding, with single-family homes being subdivided. In response, state-owned factories began building housing quarters and villages, which introduced different levels of access control, often including walls and gates. These became the closest version of modern gated communities (Wu, 2005).

In the Philippines, Western influence arrived earlier because of its colonial history. During Spanish rule, urban segregation was already present, Manila, for example, was enclosed by a wall to protect the colonizers, while the native population was banned and kept outside. In 1898, the United States acquired the territory, beginning a new phase of colonization. Modernist planning ideas were introduced, reshaping urban spaces to resemble those in the U.S. In the first half of the 20th century, this resulted in exclusive, enclosed neighborhoods for the elite, modeled after North American suburbs (Lorenzo et al., 2020).

It wasn't until the late 20th century that modern forms of gating began to spread globally. Because of the energy crisis of the 1970s, governments across different political ideologies started cutting spending on public services and welfare. In the 1980s, deregulation followed as neoliberalism gained ground (Grant, 2008). This move toward privatized, market-driven systems helped gated communities gain popularity, especially in the U.S., Latin America, and parts of Asia (Schubert, 2000).

The historical precedents of gating were relatively self-sufficient, with a greater and more diverse population living inside the walls, and with a system of governance that was not mediated by a legal framework. These new relationships born within the interaction between market, state, and the people are probably the biggest contrast in the evolution of gated communities (Sardar, 2010). Mckenzie (1994) refers to a new set of covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) to which the residents, agreeingly, are now subjected to.

Market-Driven urban development

After the 1970's, urban dynamics shifted due to significant changes in the global economy. The model of mass production and stable labor markets declined, leading to deindustrialization and accumulation capitalism. Cities adopted market strategies to attract investment, emphasizing public-private partnerships, consumption-centered spaces, and cultural spectacles. This transition promoted gentrification, deepened social inequalities, and intensified class divisions. While affluent areas flourished through symbolic capital, poorer communities faced displacement and economic struggle, leading to the rise of informal economies and spatial segregation (Harvey, 1990).

Under this context, gated communities take their contemporary form in western countries as a consequence of neo-liberalism (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Saskia Sassen (2010, page xi) points to that global shift as the base in which enclosure grows in popularity,


underlining that is not limited to the cities, but a response to the political, social and economic background in a broader physical context:

> "Does the fact that urban gating grew so sharply since the 1980s, at least compared with most of the 20th century, point to a foundational dynamic in the current global age, one that extends well beyond cities and urban communities?"

The force of the market in the emergence of neoliberal policies, the political disengagement with social reality, and the changes in the production of services lead to contrasting effects inside cities, development focuses on affluent neighborhoods that are more relevant for the urban market dynamics, becoming richer, while simultaneously urban decline spreads in more marginalized areas (Muxí, 2009). In this new game of power there are protagonist cities, with a broader concentration of enterprises dedicated to information and finance, with adjacent services such as communication and marketing, becoming key places for commanding the operations needed for a global economy (Sassen, 2001).

The goal became to create "commando" cities that can position themselves and compete within the global economic structure, developing hyperconnected areas with the capacity to economically dynamize its surroundings. These scenarios are monofunctional and car-centered, recurring to either, innovation and technology, transparent facades, and smart buildings; or nostalgia, using historical areas, transforming the preexistence and creating new images, trying to turn the memory of the city to profit (Muxí, 2009).

Left to right:
China's Hakka walled villages. Image by © Michael Yamashita

Intramuros, Manila 1898. Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons
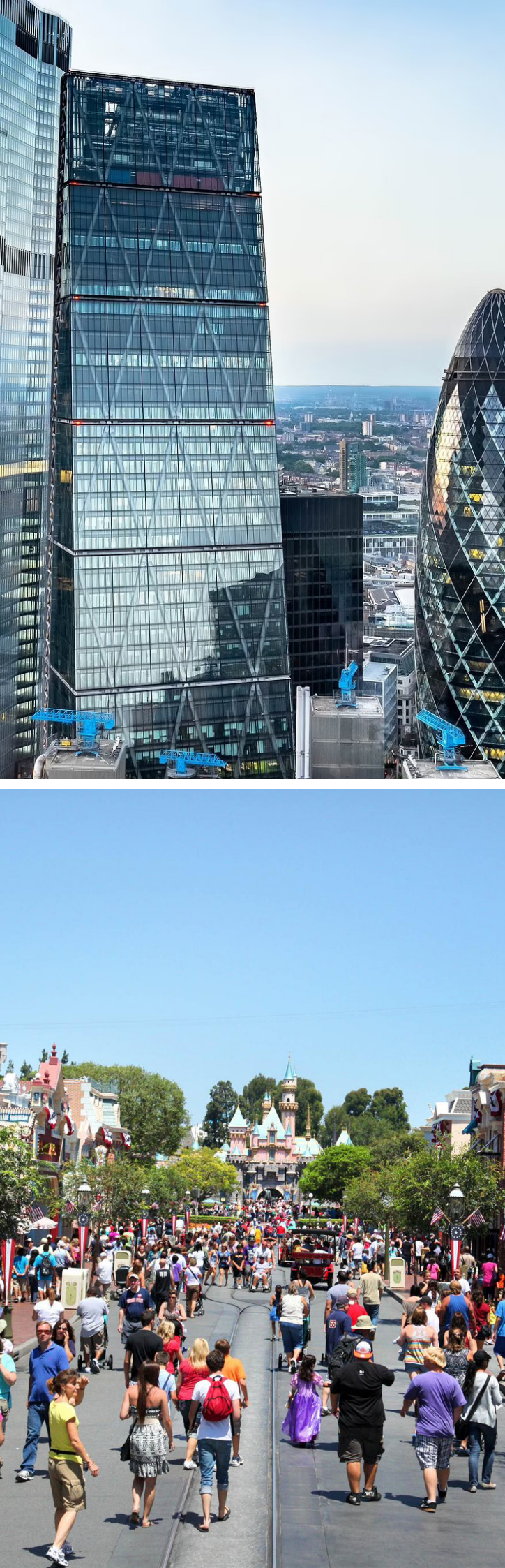
Public space in the global age

The original goal of equality and social justice in modernist planning was eventually lost, contemporary urban planning resulted in spaces where relationships are removed from the urban space and activities are dispersed. City planning and design should aim for the construction of favorable places for city diversity, to clear the way for opportunities, for unofficial plans, and for the exchange of ideas (Jacobs, 1961), these interactions are essential to sustain society, a plurality of classes, groups and identities joining together as a community is fundamental inside cities (Sardar, 2010).

Public space serves as the ideal scenario for this interplay to take place, yet historically and in current times, it has been used as a tool of control and exclusion. Public spaces under neoliberalism have been redefined as areas for consumption, private, and with a defined behavior to follow; constantly monitored and regulated through architectural design that subtly and explicitly excludes certain groups; claiming a narrative of inclusivity while in reality using spatial and social barriers (Ghirardo, 1996). The public realm stops having value unless it is filled with commercial or institutional intent, denying organic and informal uses of the space.

Ghirardo (1996) proposes Disney theme parks are an example of how contemporary "public spaces" are configured: carefully staged, commercialized and highly regulated places. Malls, museums, plazas, marketplaces and even city centers aim to be simulated idealized environments such as the Disney model, in there every interaction is mediated by consumption, where order, predictability and surveillance are essential for its correct functioning.

Still, there is a notion that cities under neoliberalism became sites of creativity, freedom and multicultural interaction, instead they are characterized by privatized and controlled spaces design to segregate: Not designed for interaction and inclusivity, but for safety and consumer comfort; Defined by consumption, with shopping malls and business districts being prioritized, while social needs such as housing, health care, and public services are now treated as commodities; Creating new forms of exclusion as traditionally public spaces such as parks and streets become less accessible for marginalized groups; and a political drive towards a "fortress mentality", materialized by gated communities and safe commerce areas, reinforcing fragmentation between groups (Christopherson, 1994).

Discourse of fear

Some of the usually pointed causes for the rise in popularity of these enclaves is fear. Setha Low (2001) highlighted that they are not simply a response to crime, but rather a reflection of cultural narratives and social anxieties. Her analysis determined that although statistically crime rates had declined in the U.S. cities, the perception of insecurity remained, and was amplified by media and political discourses.

Apart from the fear of crime, violence, or urban decline, the globalization narrative also incentives a fear of the other. Caldeira (2007, page 312), speaking about the growth of gated communities and private enclaves in São Paulo, reflected on the fear of the one that does not take part in the contemporary dynamics of the global city:

> "The man approaching the gate is a strong candidate for suspicion because he is on foot instead of driving a car—that is, he uses the city's public space in a way that the residents of the gated community reject."

It becomes a cycle, privatization and enclosure of the urban space in response to a perception of insecurity and fear of crime contributes to the contemporary replication of gated communities (Blakely, 2007). Offering a sense of control, predictability, and homogeneity. They are not only marketed as secure, but as a complete lifestyle removed from the complexities of urban life, revealing that the motivations behind gated living are not just practical or economic, but deeply cultural and political (Low, 2001).

Other regions

It is under the context of globalization that gated communities evolved from their predecessors into their current form. They are not an isolated phenomenon, but part of an entire system of exclusionary and controlled spaces designed for consumption and business, strengthened through the discourse of fear. The west is constantly linked with the global spread of gating; however, specificities exist all over the world. In a study comparing condominiums and gated communities in São Paulo and Los Angeles, Caldeira (1996, page 320) stated:

> "The Garden City model, modernist design and city planning, and now the fortified enclaves, 'outer cities', and theme parks are part of the repertoire from which different cities around the world are now drawing."

Although anecdotal evidence and studies from various parts of the world indicate that the rise of private communities globally has been shaped by the U.S. experience (Webster et al, 2002), as stated before, not every country has had the same development and consequently not the same emergence for contemporary gating.

Going back to the cases of China and the Philippines, similar trends regarding a shift towards more market-oriented policies in the late 20th century can be identified. In China, reforms starting in 1979 shifted the economy from a socialist-planned to a more market-oriented one, housing started to become a market product, and previously state or workplace administered services like cleaning, security, and childcare became a commodity. Deindustrialization affected largely the working class, and inequality grew. This is when new types of housing appeared, gated neighborhoods with high quality services and security were available only for those who could afford it, bringing social and economic separation (Wu, 2005).

As for the Philippines, after the 1970's gated communities grew and diversified. Some even were recognized as bangarays (the smallest administrative unit), meaning that private enclaves took on semi-public administrative roles. These enclaves featured amenities such as parks, chapels, halls, aiming for self-sufficiency. Developers expanded and offered alternatives for diver socioeconomic classes, maintaining physical barriers. Despite their growth, urban planning and policies remained behind, and to this day challenges regarding privatization of urban space and services remain (Lorenzo et al., 2020).

Global spread

The shift in the global economy and politics led to these private enclaves expanding, still the local conditions resulted in these transformations to have their own particularities. In the U.S. (which is seen as the model exported to other parts of the world), gated communities are diverse aiming to different markets, from retirees to affluent professionals, and community associations rise providing localized governance and services, incentivizing the reference for privatized urban management (Webster et al, 2002).

In South Africa gated communities were shaped by segregation tied to the apartheid era, and although modern forms are racially inclusive they still reflect deep-rooted social inequalities; In Lebanon they first emerged during the civil war as a security response, an adaptation to conflict and fragmented urban control; In Saudi Arabia it has taken mainly two forms, with family-based compounds reinforcing privacy and cultural values, and with large enclaves for expatriates, designed to separate foreign influences from the society; In Europe gated communities are less common, still during the 1980's they propagated through Western and Southern Europe, usually driven by housing market trends and personal demands, and during the 1990's they appeared in major cities with different experiments in Eastern and Central Europe, but still not reaching the spread seen in the U.S. or in Latin America (Webster et al, 2002).

In Latin America the spread of gated communities has been particularly rapid and pronounced, driven by insecurity, economic inequality, and inefficient public institutions. Unlike in the United States, where gating is mostly a market segment, in Latin America is more directly associated with social segregation and urban fragmentation. These enclaves highly contrast with their surroundings in regards of wealth and service provision. However, they are not necessarily a product for the wealthy, but also for the middle class and growing professionals (Webster et al, 2002).

Gated communities in Latin America

Approaching Bogotá, the case-study of this thesis, it is relevant to address how the evolution of gating took place in Latin America, and which particularities defined the shape of the current gated communities in the region.

Parallel to the rest of the world, Latin America has a precedent of urban fortification and segregation. With the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese rigid social hierarchies were implemented in colonial cities. The "Leyes de Indias" (Indies Code) was the legislation used to regulate social, political and economic life of the territories belonging to the Spanish empire. Urban planning followed standardized guidelines: a regular grid was traced over the preexisting settlements, centered around a Plaza (Square), where administrative and symbolic power concentrated. This area was reserved for the colonizers, pushing indigenous populations to the peripheries (Roitman & Giglio, 2010).

During the post-independence period across the region, despite political changes, land access remained concentrated in the elites. In Mexico City, for example, during the second half of the 19th century the historic center lost its exclusivity as public spaces became occupied by commercial activity. In response, the elite began looking for quieter, more prestigious areas on the outskirts, giving rise to bourgeois suburban neighborhoods. These new developments were led by the private sector and can be seen as early examples of space privatization. This shift contributed to social exclusion, as lower-income groups were unable to afford housing in these areas. As a result, segregation based on race gradually shifted into segregation based on class (Sheinbaum, 2010).

A similar situation happened throughout the region during the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th

century. Cities like Buenos Aires, Havana, Lima, Santiago de Chile, or Rio de Janeiro saw a distancing from colonial symbols with the introduction of grand civic infrastructure modeled after European urban design (especially Haussmann plan for Paris), becoming symbols of modernization, but often at the cost of displacement and marginalization of the recent immigrants and indigenous groups, giving rise to informal housing (Casciato & Alonso, 2021).

During this period rapid rural to urban migration and industrial development lead to an explosive population growth in Latin American cities, mainly capitals. In response urbanism focused on the integration of European planning principles like zoning and garden city models, rather than building an identity or attending local needs (Almandoz, 2006). Urban peripheries began to be associated with poverty, while central or newly planned suburban areas became linked with progress and modernity (Roitman & Giglio, 2010).

For the 1930's and 1940's Latin America was already a place for experimentation in its urban environment. On the following decades modernist architecture and urban planning were seen as the visual language of development, with large scale university projects in Caracas and Mexico City, or social housing projects in Brazil based on the principles by CIAM and Le Corbusier (Plaza, 2011). At the same time, the United States planning instruments started to influence urban design and development (Almandoz, 2006). During the 1960's Latin America became a field of ideological dispute in the context of the Cold War, the U.S. encouraged alliances in the region promoting social and urban development as means to maintain a capitalist stability (Guimarães & Albiero, 2022). Although urban planning was seen as the answer to the emerging issues, most of these plans served more as manifests than actually implemented projects (Almandoz, 2018).

Left to right:

University campus UNAM, Mexico City, Mexico. Image by © Fomento Cultural Banamex

Modernist Pedregulho Housing Complex, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Image by Grupo de Pesquisa Pioneiros da Habitação Social no Brasil, 1950.

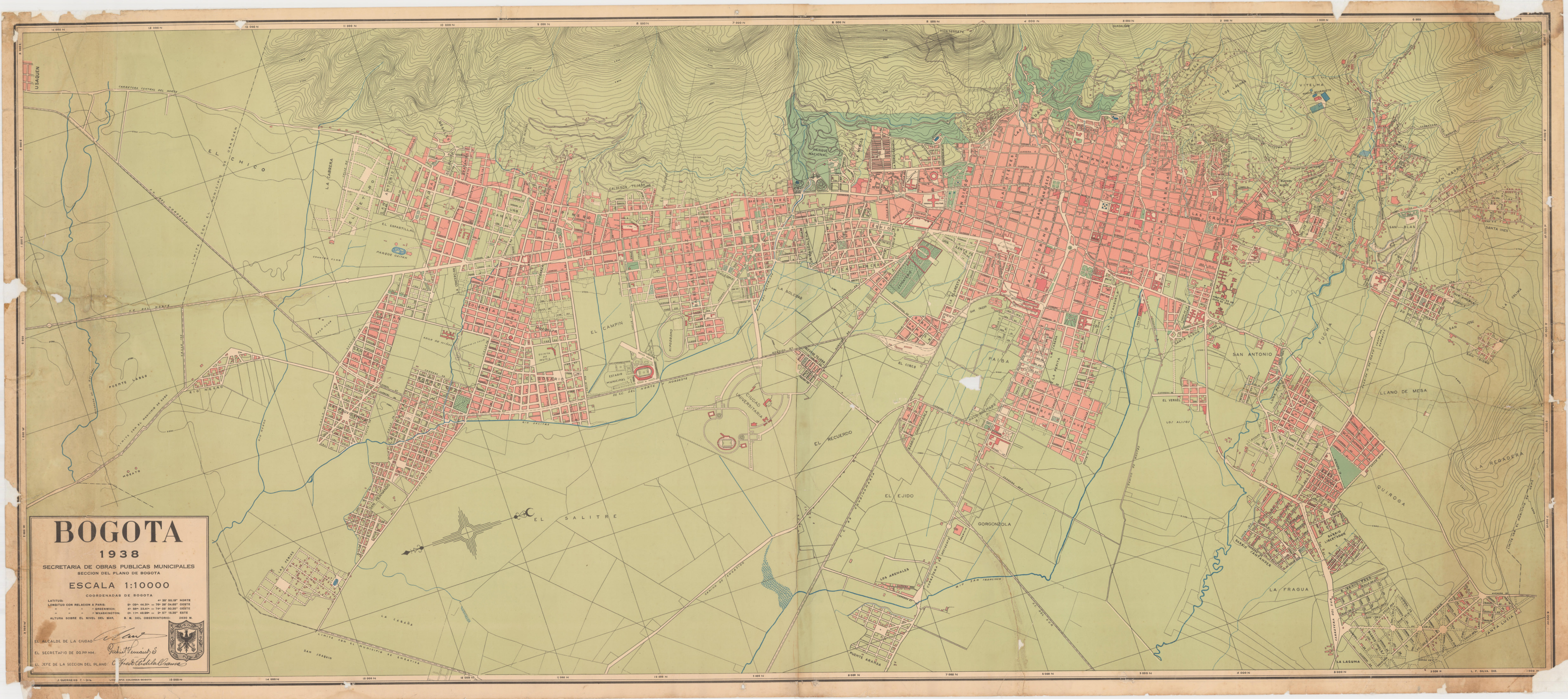Vila Andrade, São Paulo, Brazil. Image by ©Tuca Vieira

Metropolises in the region continued their rapid growth, deepening the divide between formal and informal areas. Urban insecurity started to rise as a bigger issue during the 1980's, and while elite neighborhoods were still exclusive, an inclination towards separation and protection started to influence residential preferences. In this context, and with the arrival of neoliberal policies and reforms towards the 1990's, gated communities multiplied across the region, selling security and exclusivity in contrast to the surrounding informal neighborhoods (Roitman & Giglio, 2010).

Across Latin America contemporary gated communities started to replicate. In her book "The Architecture of the Global City", while speaking about the residential turn in Buenos Aires regarding closed neighborhoods and condominiums, Zaida Muxí (2009, page 78) stated:

"In Latin American cities, where insecurity of all kinds — economic, physical, labor-related, and social — is widespread, the model of escaping reality and seeking isolation prevails. Those who can afford it abandon the city to take refuge in mythical places."

In Mexico City, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and multiple cities throughout the region, privatization in the form of horizontal gated communities, condominiums, and private neighborhoods has modeled an image of fragmentation, with abrupt contrasts between private enclaves and informal settlements or working-class areas, intensifying spatial and symbolic exclusion, as well as fear and isolation (Caldeira, 2007; Sheinbaum, 2010; Roitman & Giglio, 2010).

BOGOTA
1938
SECRETARIA DE OBRAS PUBLICAS MUNICIPALES
SECCION DEL PLANO DE BOGOTA
ESCALA 1:10000

1.2 Gating - Case study Bogotá

Bogotá, Colombia. A fragmented city

Bogotá is the capital of Colombia. Located at its center, it represents the economic and political main city of the country. Based on population projections from the 2018 National Population and Housing Census (CNPV 2018) conducted by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), for 2021 the city had a population of 7.857.455 inhabitants. With an approximate population density of 4.436 people per km2, it is one of the most populated cities in Latin America (Mayorga Henao & Ortiz Veliz, 2020).

Historically, the city followed similar patterns to the other cities and capitals in Latin America. Since the beginning of its expansion, when the post-colonial Bogotá was only surrounded by public land and private estates, the city witnessed how profit and speculation would guide its development. Since the 1880's with processes such as the parcelación (di-

vision of former rural lands into lots) of Chapinero in the north of the city, a transformation started, where landowners went from being traditional rentiers to land entrepreneurs, interested in selling lots and developing. Urbanization was then promoted by new actors: heirs who would exploit the rent of their land; speculators who would strategically buy land where the city was expected to grow; and entrepreneurs who would influence public policies to maximize the profit form their properties (Mejía Pavony & Colón Llamas, 2019).

Since 1914, a perimeter was defined to delimit until where the city could expand formally and have access to public services such as aqueducts and sewerage, roads, and parks. This perimeter was constantly modified in the following years, still various neighborhoods emerged outside of the perimeter, leading to informality and urbanization without basic services. The local government tried to regulate these new developments and the land free market, but institutional weakness and lack of resources made enforcement difficult (Mejía Pavony & Colón Llamas, 2019).

At the same time that informality and market-led urbanization were on the rise, modernist influence from Europe and the United States arrived. The Garden City model and U.S.

City Planning were the base for the city's expansion plans during the first half of the 20th century. Self-sufficient neighborhoods, plazas, breaking the regular grid, and an emphasis on green infrastructure and sanitation were the main goal for Bogotá's expansion. Although the concept of isolated constructions surrounded by green areas might seem the most significant change, the disappearance of the traditional lot division and its relationship with the street is what really had deep implications for the development of the city (De la Carrera, 2023).

Some issues arose because of the tensions between the plans and how the city was actually developed; the growth responded to immediate needs or political and economic agendas, ignoring the plans; and at the same some parts of the plan were developed without it being actually adopted by law (Alba Castro, 2021).

During the 1960's, as part of the efforts from the U.S. to promote capitalism in the region, the program Alianza para el Progreso (Alliance for Progress) was implemented as means to export modernity to Latin America, financing models of urban planning inspired on European and North American functionalism. An example is Ciudad Kennedy in Bogotá, a big scale housing project covering 350 ha and originally thought for 200.000 people. Influenced by the ideas of Le Corbusier and modernist urbanism, the plan implemented zoning, pedestrian-vehicle separation, large green areas, and an integral planning of services, the idea was to propose a rational and efficient city, far from the urban disorder that characterized many Latin American metropolises. The project was not completed, and fell short in resolving social and urban issues in the city, being an emblematic case of the limits of imported models. (Guimarães & Albiero, 2022).

Seen as an attempt to "civilize" the newly arrived urban population, it is a reflection on how, more than urban projects, these ideas are an external view about what Latin America should have been and what it should have aspired to be: modern, integrated, developed, and aligned with western ideals. A legacy of fragmentation and segregation that would still be evident in the following decades with the emergence of contemporary gated communities.

Before gated communities

Early housing complexes in Bogotá were composed of attached or semi-detached houses, following the same or a similar design, generally grouped for safety and recognized under the same name. An example is the currently abandoned Pasaje Michonik (1930), located in the historical center, it is considered the first complex in the city responding to the need for optimizing space to accommodate more people in a reduced area. One thing that characterized these housing complexes is that they had no restrictions of access (Tovar, 2011; Hernández Meléndez, 2022).

Prior to the half of the 20th century the juridic system in Colombia did not contemplate a clear way of dividing real estate property between private and common areas, making the construction of multifamily buildings (a need in response to rapid urban growth) harder. On April 9, 1948, the assassination of the liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitan sparked an uprising known as "El Bogotazo", where various parts of the city center were destroyed. The urgency to reconstruct brought a new way of organizing property, allowing a building to have different owners with individual rights over apartments, and shared rights over communal zones, also known as horizontal property (Hernández Velasco, 2013).

This would lead to the emergence of condominiums, closed housing complexes, shopping malls, and office buildings working under the horizontal property regime (Hernández Velasco, 2013). Before the 1970's, state participation was primordial in the production of social housing and urbanization, land and neighborhood legalization, and the provision of public services, generally under the influence of the modernist movement (Cuervo Calle, 2015). In Bogotá, some projects from this period not only reflect the housing developments of the time, but also serve as examples of how gated communities would later become widespread in the city:

- The Centro Urbano Antonio Nariño (1952-1957) is a state-led multifamily development designed by Néstor C. Gutiérrez in collaboration with the firm Esguerra Sáenz, Urdaneta, Suárez y Cía. It consists of 14 apartment buildings of diverse heights, organized in the form of a superblock with large green areas, shared services, and wide communal and pedestrian zones. It followed the European modernist ideas, encouraging functional autonomy and a reduction of urban displacements. Initially it was open to the city, without access restrictions, but an increasing perception of insecurity eventually led to its perimetral fencing, losing its original integrated character (Martínez Toro, 2016).
- The Conjunto Residencial El Polo (1959-1963) was also a state-led multifamily development designed by Rogelio Salmona and Guillermo Bermúdez. The project was originally distinguished for the quality of its urban space, green areas, human scale design, and harmonic articulation and integration with its surroundings and the city. In the 1990's with the expansion of adjacent roads the complex remains exposed to noise and contamination, added to the security concerns, in 1992 a brick wall enclosure was lifted modifying the original aim of the project (Martínez Toro, 2016).

Centro Urbano Antonio Nariño, 1952. Image by © Gumersindo Cuéllar Jiménez

These examples point to the start of a transformation towards a defensive and privatized logic, with projects that were originally planned to be integrated in their contexts and into the city, now being adapted to follow the isolation of its residents, more in line with the growing market-led development ideals at the time.

Conjunto residencial El Polo, 1991. Image by © Rogelio Salmona-Arquitectura y Poética del Lugar. Edited by author to show where the wall was lifted.

The turn to private capital

After the 1970's, parallelly to the rest of the world, the commodification of housing emerged. The state adopted neoliberal strategies of partial privatization, reducing urbanistic standards, and relying on the private sector (first on construction companies and then banks) to supply the deficit. Housing then became a place for investment, leaving aside it its social dimension. Still, the deficit persisted and kept on growing, while accommodation solutions were increasingly smaller in size and quality (Cuervo Calle, 2015).

In this scenario the gated communities set off as one of the most functional products for the global neoliberal logic. They are a low-risk investment due to the banking of supply and demand, encouraging buyers to open accounts and access to mortgage loans, entering the financial system as indebted consumers, feeding back into the model. Their physical characteristics also favor their economic appropriation: A standardized scheme that facilitates the massive construction of units, making it attractive for investments; the ease with which this model can be replicated throughout multiple cities and social classes; and the promise of status and security, being presented as spaces of privilege and control, profiting from urban fear and aspirations of differentiation (Martínez Toro, 2016).

Shopping malls are a complementary product for gated communities in the neoliberal model. In Bogotá they have been rapidly expanding since the 1970's. Mayorga Henao (2016) studied the growth of both typologies in Bogotá, to determine if there was a correlation to their rising popularity, he found that:

- The construction of shopping malls had a steady increase between 1975 and 2015. From 2 malls in the 1970's, the city reached 28 major scale malls with a higher area than 30.000m2 (some being 3 or 4 times bigger). Just those built between 2010-2015 represent 25% of the commercial area of the city.
- Gated communities went from 5% of the city's housing production in 1940 to 68% in 2015, meaning it became the predominant residential typology. Housing outside of the category of gated communities saw a major decrease in construction since 1999, changing from 89% of the housing production in 1980, to 32 % in 2015.

- There is a strong correlation between the constructed area between shopping malls and gated communities. Finding as well that 98% of the growth of one typology could be explained by the growth of the other. An example is Unicentro (the first major shopping mall in Bogotá built in 1976), where numerous gated communities emerged in its surroundings. A situation where malls serve as anchors for enclosed housing developments, and that has been repeated with various big-scale shopping malls in the city.

Showing that in the recent decades Bogotá has been molded mostly by these real estate products that represent a fragmented, controlled, and privatized city.
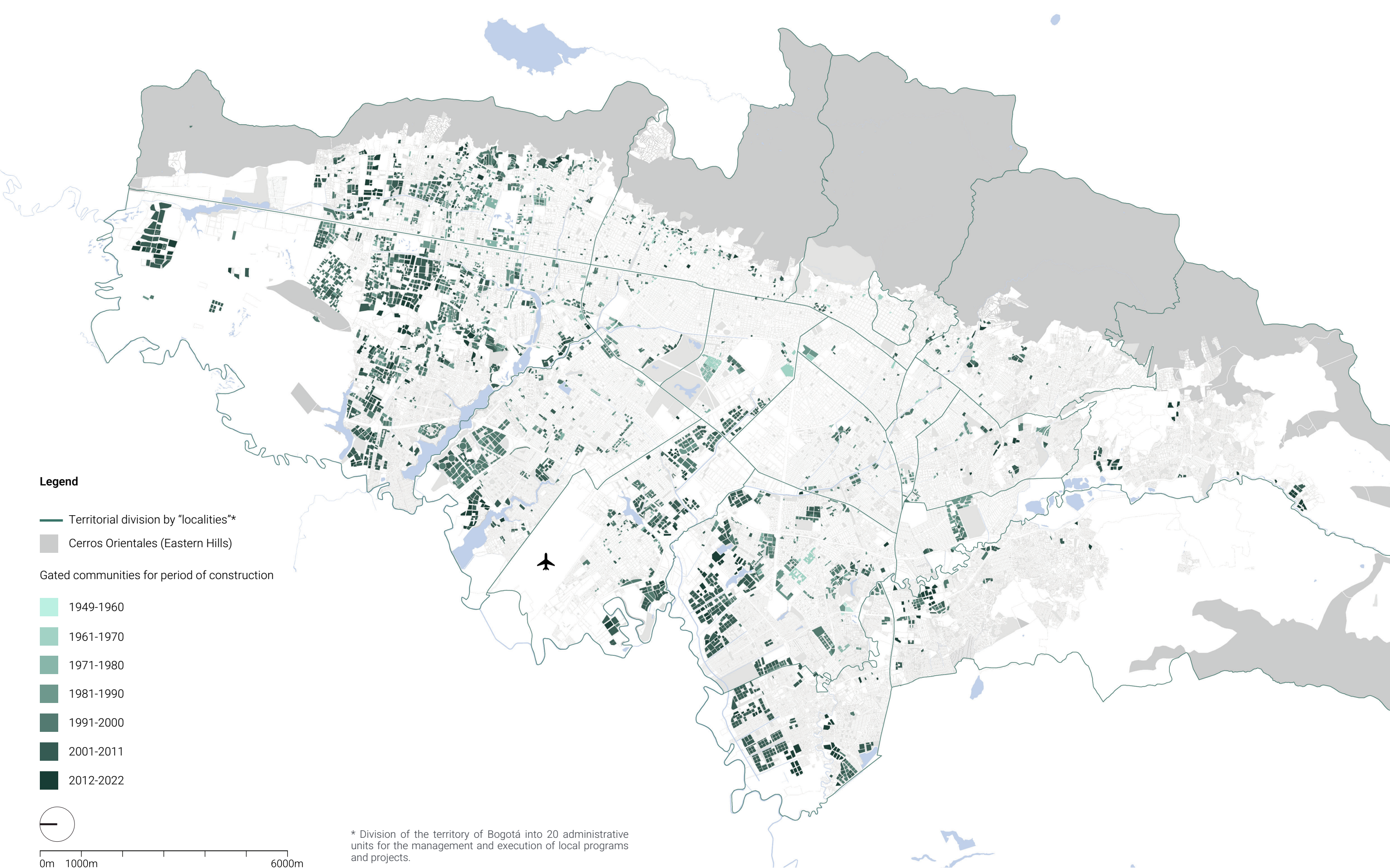
Map 1. Historical development of gated communities in Bogotá, 1949-2022. Redrawn and complemented by the Author. Source: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), UAECD. Base de Datos Catastral de Bogotá, 2013.

Gated community in Bogotá. Image by © Author

Gated communities in Bogotá

Among the materials explored in the research process early in the thesis, the book Rejalópolis, Ciudad de Fronteras ("Reja" means fence in Spanish), by Fernando De la Carrera (2023), stood out for its relevance on the topic. It expands on the phenomenon of gated communities in Bogotá, looking at its normative history, and the cultural and social conditions that favored their success. Crossing data extracted from the database of the Special Administrative Unit of the District Cadaster (UAECD) from 2013 and 2017, and the Multipurpose Survey for Bogotá (EMB) conducted by the DANE and the District Planning Secretariat (SDP) in 2011, De la Carrera quantified, illustrated and mapped the magnitude of the phenomenon in the city.

  While comparing gated communities with other housing types using only quantified data might be unfair, since they are very different in essence with their own particularities in their replication efforts (De la Carrera, 2023), this data highlights a shift, and gives light to the impact gated communities have had on the city's housing supply and urban growth patterns.

  Gated communities account for 7,5% of the total urban surface of Bogotá, considering not only housing, but infrastructure, parks, industry, and roads. In only a
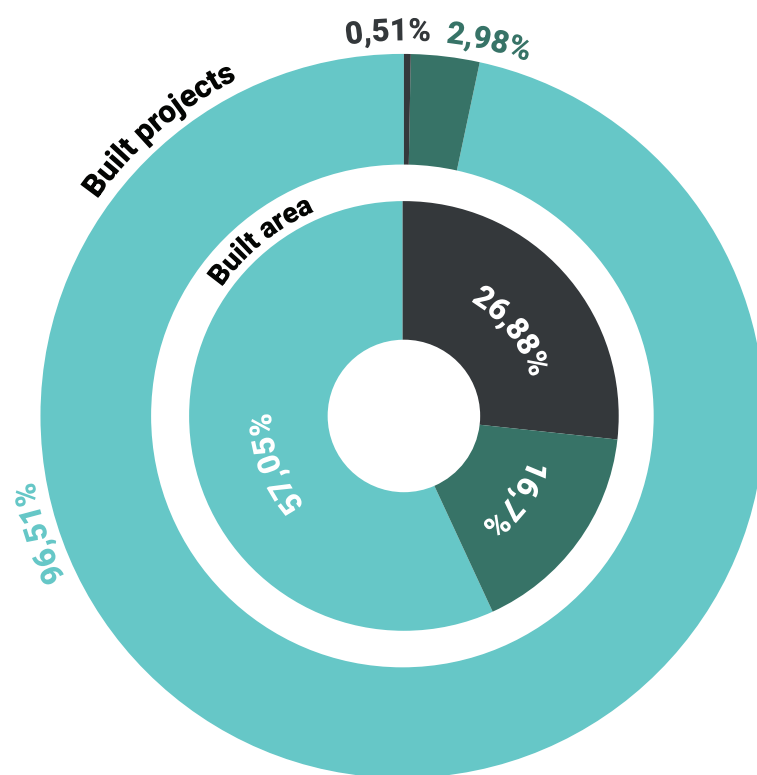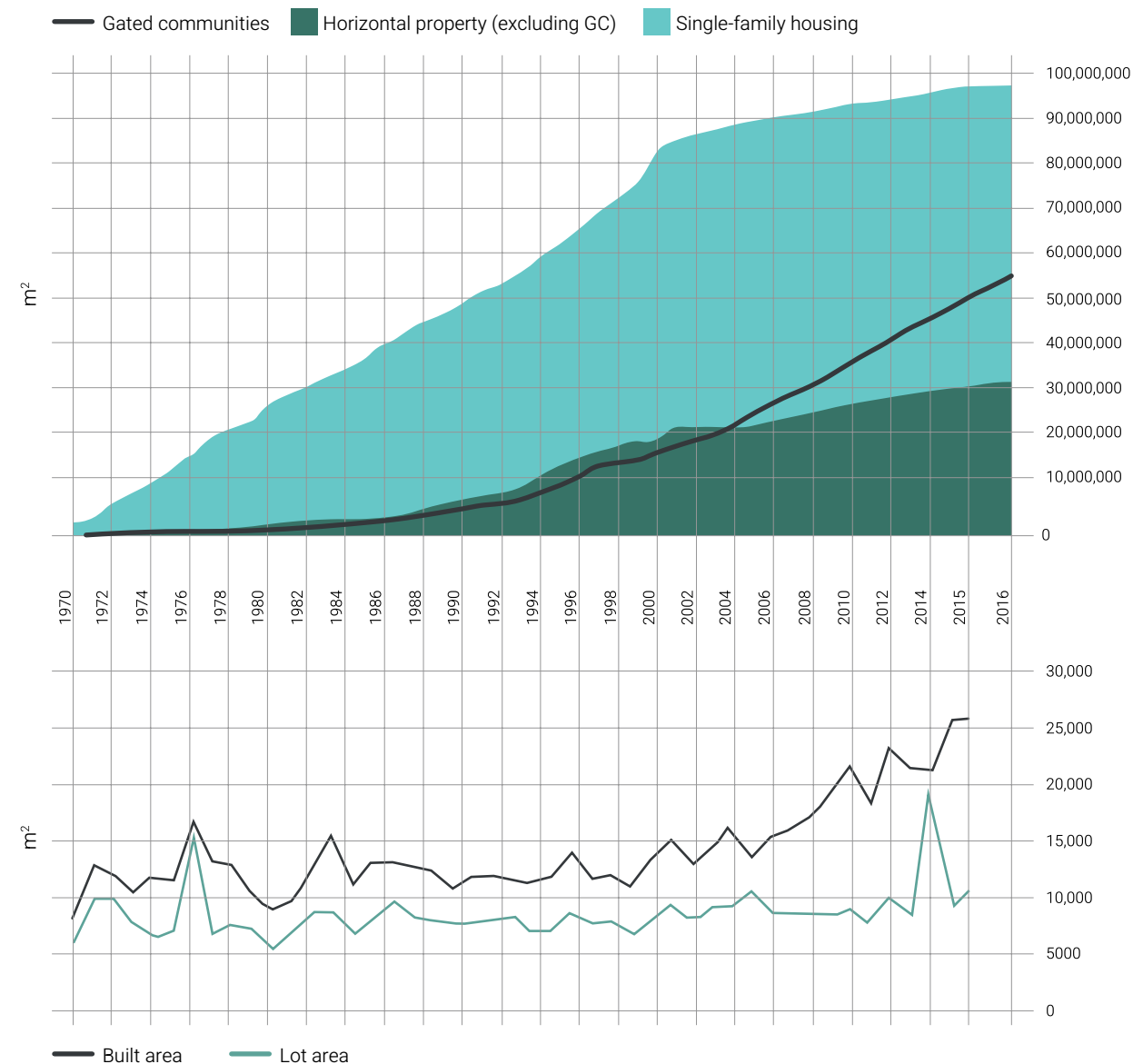

- **Gated communities**
  3,531 projects built - 54,307,039 m²

- **Horizontal property (excluding GC)**
  20,729 projects built - 32,454,488 m²

- **Single-family housing**
  Aprox. 670,100 projects built - 115,224,042 m²

Graph 1: Number of projects vs. Built area (m²) in Bogotá 1950-2017
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), UAECD (2013, 2017).

Graph 2: Growth trend of gated communities compared to other types of housing (m2) 1970-2016
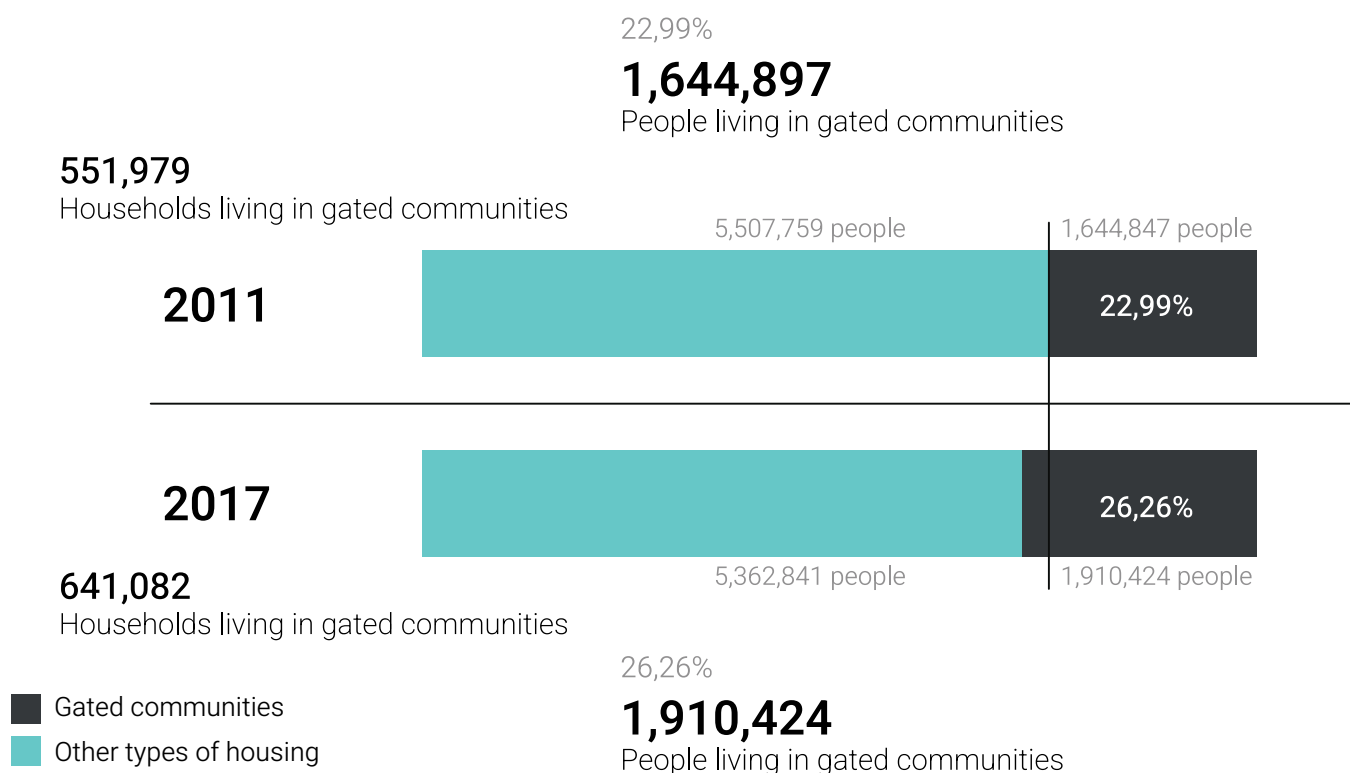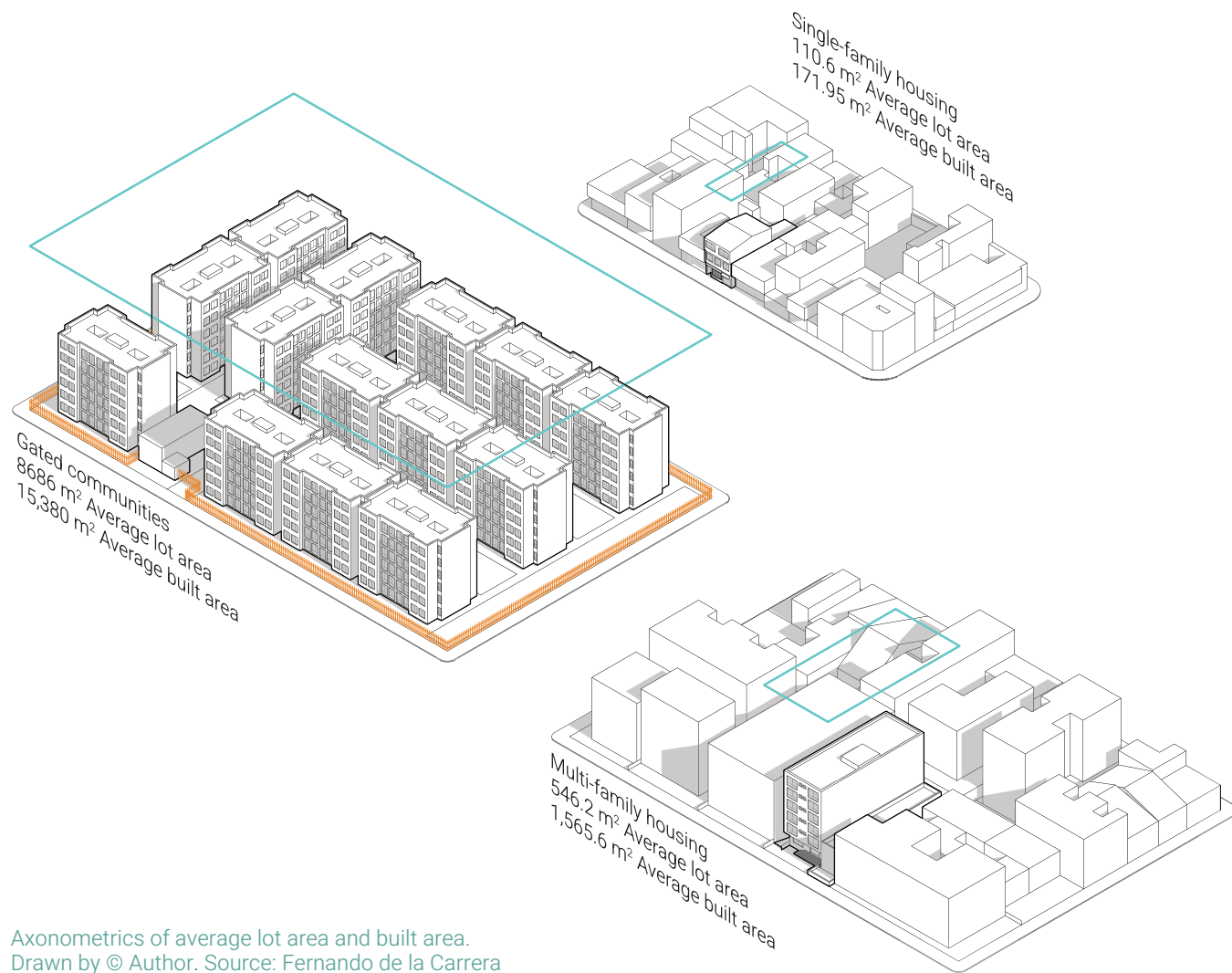Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023).

Variation in the built-up area per project vs. the area of the lot per project in gated communities 1970-2015
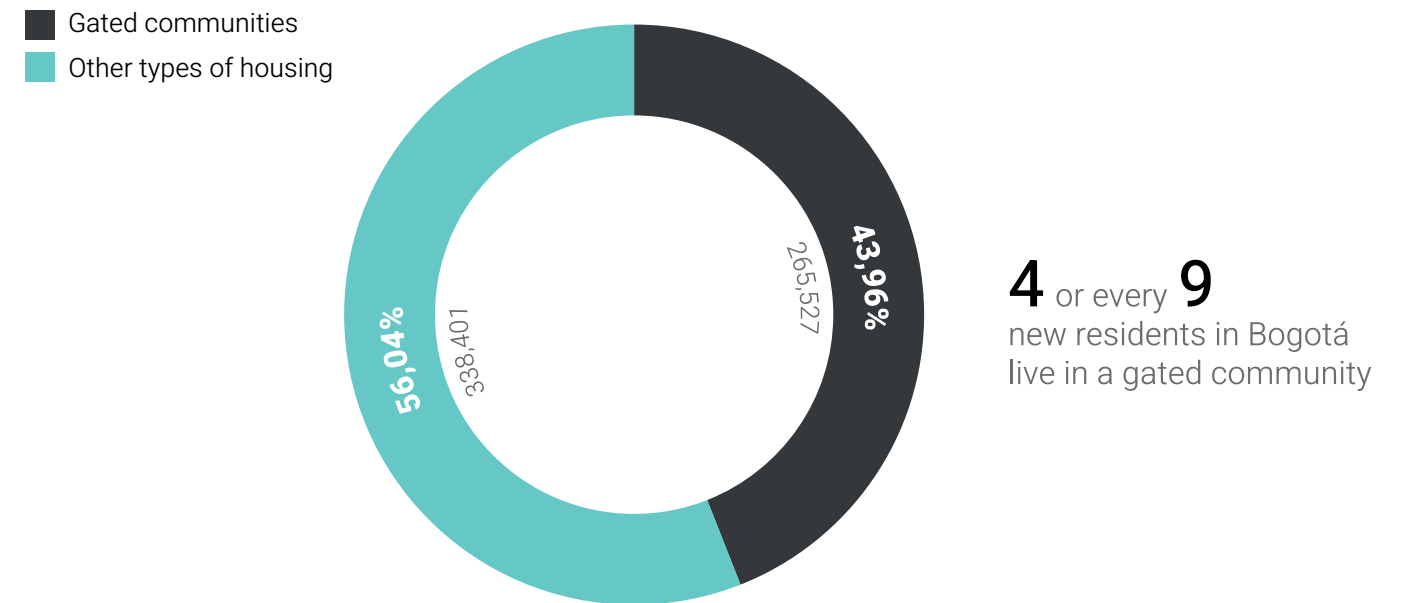Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023).

couple decades, and with relatively few projects (approximately 3035 for 2014, and 3531 for 2017), they became one of the most prevalent housing typologies in the city, representing 27% of the total area constructed for residential use from 1951 until 2017 (graph 1). This information becomes more impactful considering that most of these initiatives and building licenses have been concentrated in the last decades since the 1990's, showing not only its rapid growth, but it dominance over more traditional forms of housing (graph 2) (De la Carrera, 2023).

  New developments occupy significantly larger areas in comparison to traditional single-family homes or multifamily buildings excluding the gated enclaves. These earlier forms of housing adapted and integrated into the city's existing patterns, as their lots were part of existing blocks. In contrast, newer interventions tend to occupy entire blocks, deepening their physical and social isolation. Additionally, there has been a consistent increase in the size of residential lots and built areas (graph 3), reflecting the influence of real estate developers lobbying for greater buildability and profitability (De la Carrera, 2023).

Single-family housing
110.6 m² Average lot area
171.95 m² Average built area

Gated communities
8686 m² Average lot area
15,380 m² Average built area

Multi-family housing
546.2 m² Average lot area
1,565.6 m² Average built area

Axonometrics of average lot area and built area.
Drawn by © Author. Source: Fernando de la Carrera

22,99%
1,644,897
People living in gated communities

551,979
Households living in gated communities

	5,507,759 people	1,644,847 people
2011		22,99%

	5,362,841 people	1,910,424 people
2017		26,26%

641,082
Households living in gated communities

26,26%
1,910,424
People living in gated communities

■ Gated communities
■ Other types of housing

Graph 4: Population residing in gated communities and other types of housing in Bogota 2011 vs. 2017
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), EMB 2011 (DANE/SDP), CNPV 2018, UAECD (2013, 2017).

Gated communities have become one of the most popular housing solutions by the city's residents. According to the EMP 2017, when asked about the type of accommodation they live in, approximately 37% said to live in one of these enclaves (Kostenwein, 2021), although it differs from the 26,3% from the Cadastral Database (graph 4), both numbers are still significant. Additionally, almost 44% of the new residents between 2011 and 2017 are registered to live in one of these enclaves (graph 5). Demonstrating the success of a model that profits from the perception of insecurity and aspirations of upward social mobility.

■ Gated communities
■ Other types of housing

43,96%
265,527

56,04%
338,401

4 or every **9**
new residents in Bogotá
live in a gated community

Graph 5: New residents by type of housing 2011-2017
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023). UAECD (2013, 2017).

Particularities of Bogotá's enclaves

Ciudad Isla (Island City) is the name of a collective investigation about the gated communities in Bogotá. The team is composed of architects and professors that since 2015 have focused on understanding the phenomenon, bringing it to discussion, and proposing solutions. Some of their members collaborated with De la Carrera (2023) on his book; and through their theses, papers, lessons, and proposals have contributed to the study on the topic.

David Kostenwein, one of the members of the collective, in his doctoral dissertation Between Walls and Fences: How Gated Communities in Bogotá Shape Exclusive and Insecure Public Spaces Outside the Gates (2021), challenges the view of the private enclaves as isolated "fortresses", arguing that they are active shapers of the urban space surrounding them; and that their different forms have different spatial impacts.

Under the pretext that not all gated communities have the same spatial impact, he identifies 5 typologies of enclaves. Drawing from them, different manifestation will be exemplified, expanding and precising the definition given at the start of this chapter to adapt to Bogotá's specific situation.

Kostenwein (2021) identifies:

• The Imagined: A typology that fits with the more general international idea of a gated community. Not fully enclosed; with low or semi-transparent fences; sometimes no security personnel; with two or more entrances, and with large open spaces and amenities. Present some permeability but still moderately isolated. They usually cater the upper class.

- The Blockbuster: The most common type in Bogotá. Configured by large urban blocks (usually with many housing towers inside); with a continuously closed perimeter; with guarded entrances, and with few amenities. Completely isolated from its surroundings. They cater to all socioeconomic classes, and can be found in social housing.
- The Integrated: Usually smaller than the blockbuster and integrated into a city block with diverse plots. They are fenced, have only one entrance, and offer few amenities, but because of their surroundings (typically more organic and mixed-use urban environment) they are not completely isolated. They usually cater to middle-class residents.
- The Miniature: A small version of a gated community. Conformed by only one multi-story building and few open spaces. They have fences towards the surrounding streets and have only one entrance. Because of its size is better integrated into city blocks. They usually cater to high socioeconomic class.
- The Interactive: It resembles the blockbuster in density and large occupied areas. Usually, it does not offer many amenities inside its gates. It most significant difference is that at least one façade opens to the street with shops, or at least with apartment windows not isolated by fences. They tend to be older, with some built between the 1960's and 1980's. Usually catering to lower and middle-class residents.

Giving a closer look to the city would reveal even more categories, in Bogotá's metropolitan area some enclosed enclaves resembling U.S. suburbs have been growing in popularity in recent years, although those areas do not fall under the scope of this thesis. Urban developers and real estate promoters have found a way to adapt the typology for every resident. This exposes the fact that, despite the usual view of gated communities as a product for the upper and middle classes, they have also found a spot on lower socio-economic housing demands.

Typologies of gated communities in Bogotá identified by Konstenwein (2021). Image by David Kostenwein
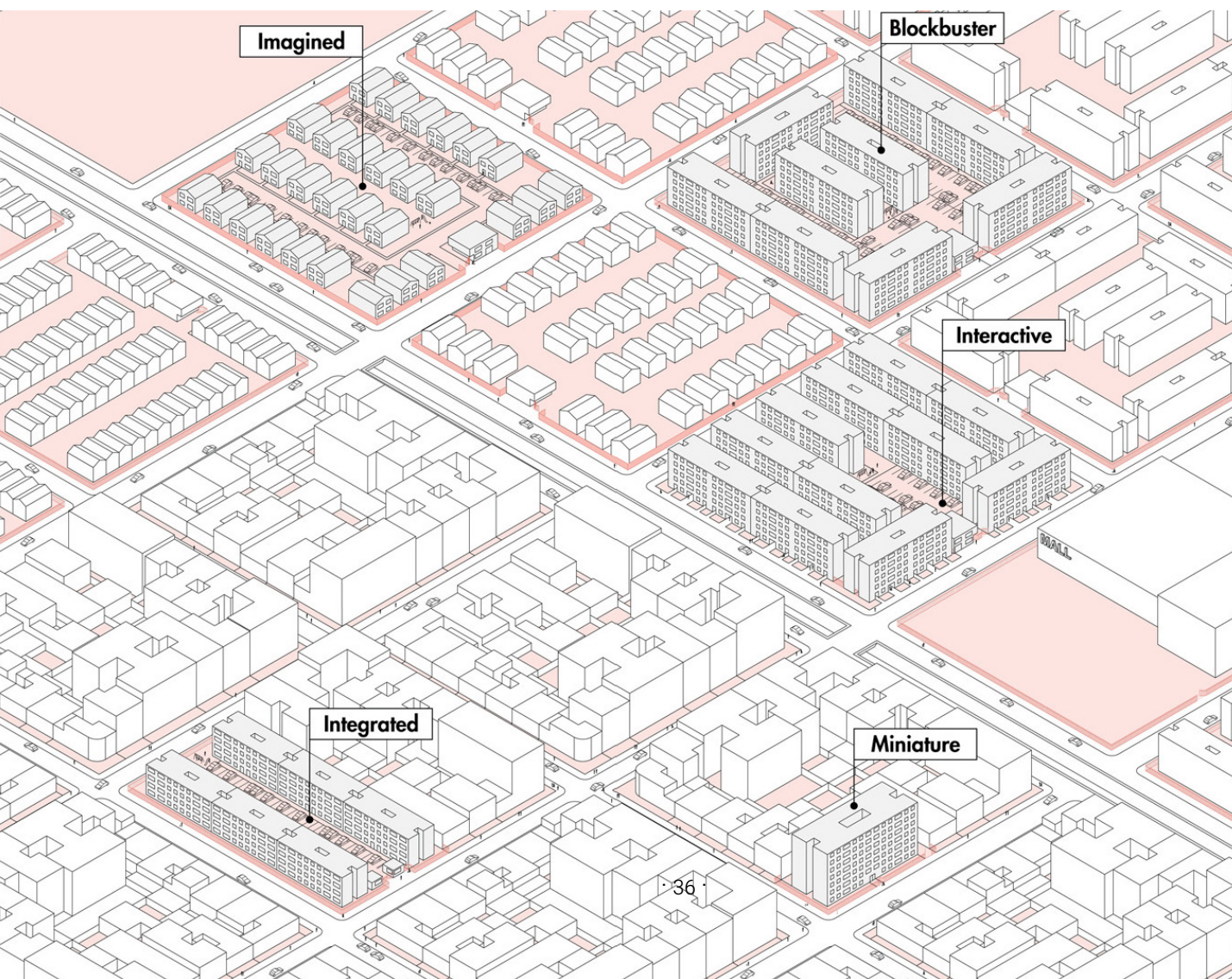
Gated communities in Bogotá. Images by © Author

Gated community in Bogotá. Image by © Author

A product for all social classes?

Colombia is a deeply unequal country, having one of the most uneven income distributions in the world. 60% of its population is either vulnerable to falling into poverty, currently living in poverty, or experiencing extreme poverty (PNUD, 2024).

In 1985, the state created a spatial classification by Estratos as a way of guaranteeing access to basic services, dividing Colombian population in six groups, so that the richest (5 and 6) would pay for the services of the poorest (1, 2, and 3); 4 would be the midpoint, which neither gives nor receives and shows market prices. The Estratos are not defined by purchasing power, but by the façade of the building, its materials, and the condition of the adjacent streets; and are considered for granting bank loans and educational scholarships, or for assessing someone's competitiveness for a job (Pardo, 2021).

This system is problematic due to its poor representation of the real socio-economic status of the population and its character of symbolic segregation, fomenting discrimination towards the lower-classes and social-class resentment. In an unequal society, it is not just the fear of crime ensuring the replication of the gated communities model, there are also aspirational motivations, such as accessing their perceived exclusivity and their attributes of high social status (Bagaeen & Uduku, 2010).

Another member of the Ciudad Isla collective, Federico Ruiz Carvajal, in his master thesis titled Life after fences: Negotiating low-income gated communities in Bogotá (2021), analyzed the challenges that arise for lower social class residents living in these enclaves, that account for the 20% of the city's urban poor.

Map 2. Socioeconomic status of the population - "estratos" by block, 2019. Drawn by author. Source: SDP 2019

0m	2000m	6000m

	1			4
	2			5
	3			6
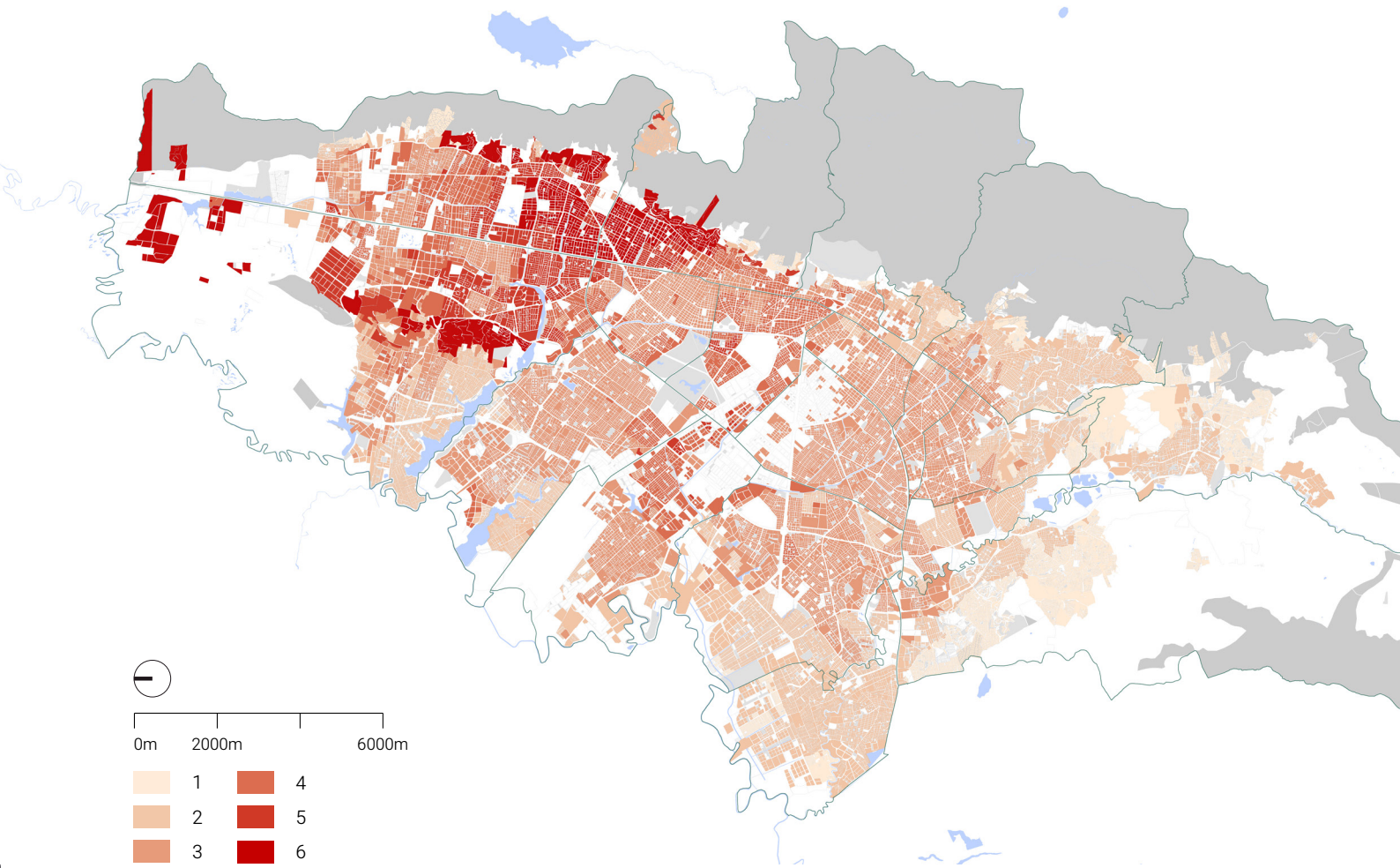
Graph 6: Percentage of housing by "estrato" - Gated communities vs. other types of housing 2011-2017
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), UAECD (2013, 2017).

■ Gated communities ■ Horizontal property (excluding GC) ■ Single-family housing

Graph 7: Percentage of housing by "estrato" - Gated communities 2017
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), UAECD (2013, 2017).

Sign reading: This complex is protected by the National Police Security Front. Image by © Author

In general, gated communities in the country have rigid and prefixed land uses, additionally they are treated as finished and unmodifiable structures, cutting any chance for a sense of identity or community to be developed. Their governance also reinforces exclusion, according to the Law 675/2001 regulating horizontal property, gated communities (referred by law as Closed Real Estate Units), must establish diverse internal governance bodies (owners assembly, administration board) that set a manual of rules on behavior, use of space, and aesthetics; regulations that can even override public urban norms, further limiting the land use, building modification, or social activities inside (Ruiz Carvajal, 2021)

Many residents of the low-income gated communities aspire to middle-class status through home-ownership, but struggle with debts and limited services. For the quarter from December 2024 to February of 2025, 42,6% of the population in cities and metropolitan areas in Colombia are informally employed (DANE, 2025). The rigidity in the governance of these enclaves limits the entrepreneurial activity and social life of its

residents. Still, people go over the restrictions by opening home businesses, modifying units informally, or selling services and goods around the gated entrances, revealing a permanent negotiation between formal systems and real everyday life (Ruiz Carvajal, 2021).

The insecure city

In the data illustrated by De la Carrera (2023), it is evident that the perception of insecurity (graphs 8 and 9) decreases from lower socio-economic status to higher, although it is similar for people living in closed enclaves and people living outside them, showing that no matter the typology of housing, people feel safer in richer zones. Now, looking at the robbery victims (graph 10 and 11), it is apparent that there is no significant difference between people living in the more traditional city and those living in gated communities.

Kostenwein (2021) found that gated communities increase insecurity in their adjacent streets, showing consistently higher crime rates. This increase showed to be right outside the

Graph 8: Percentage of households with a perception of insecurity by "estrato" according to type of housing
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), EMB 2011 (DANE/SDP)

Graph 9: Number of households with a perception of insecurity by "estrato" according to type of housing
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), EMB 2011 (DANE/SDP)

■ Gated communities ■ Other types of housing
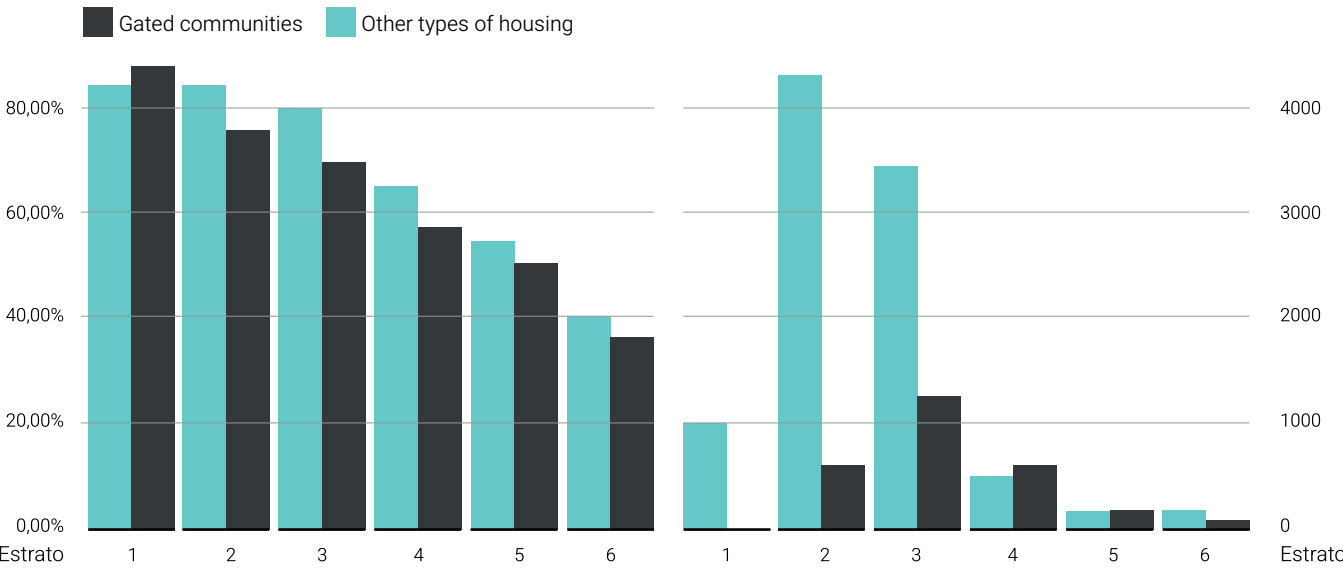
Graph 10: Percentage of people who are victims of robberies by "estrato" according to type of housing
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), EMB 2011 (DANE/SDP)

Graph 11: Number of people who are victims of robberies by "estrato" according to type of housing
Souce: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), EMB 2011 (DANE/SDP)

■ Gated communities ■ Other types of housing
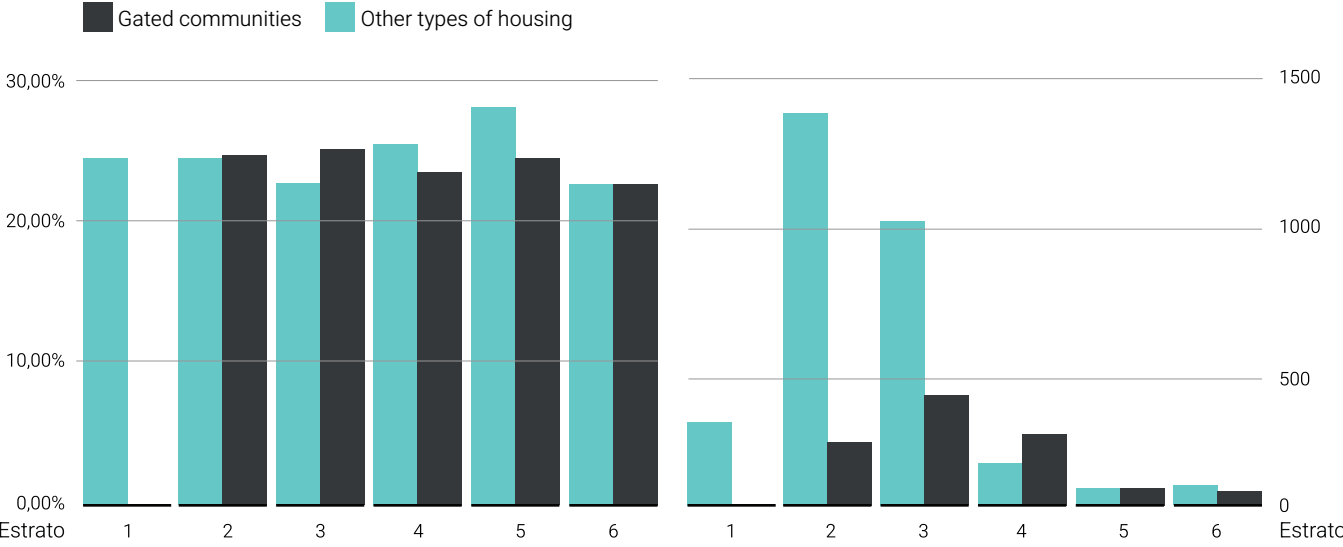
walls, implying that neighborhoods with various closed enclaves are not necessarily more dangerous, but the spaces that remain between fences and walls are. The effect is caused by a lack of activity in the street; the symbolic meaning of the barriers signifying affluence; and the fact that the security devices and staff only protect residents, leaving public space unprotected.

It is clear then that gated communities transform the public space outside of them in an exclusionary way, creating situations where people outside feel unwelcome, intimidated, marginalized, and criminalized, prioritizing the security of some at the expense of the pedestrians. Proving that crime does not disappear, but just shifts its place (Kostenwein, 2021).

The never-changing city

The "Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial" (Territorial Planning Plan or POT) is an instrument defined by the Law 388/1997, for the municipalities and districts in Colombia to define a 12-year course for their territorial planning, guiding and prioritizing the general decisions and interventions that the District Administration must make.

The current POT for Bogotá, adopted in 2021 and valid until 2035, as a result of the persistence of some people and the discussions about gated communities, is very emphatic on generating active and mixed-use ground floor facades, placing commerce or services, promoting activity and openness to the city. At the same time, encouraging the removal and reduction of enclosures. However, the impact that gated communities have had so far is engraved in the city, and due to their character, changing them to be more open and inclusive is currently more a utopian idea than an actual proposal.

De la Carrera (2023) reflected:

"From the day the last brushstroke was given to their glossy fences until the days of the graffiti artists' arrests of creativity and fury, these 'old new cities' will be shielded against the passage of time and the changing demands of their inhabitants."

Additionally, developers are finding other ways to build enclosed housing with loopholes in the POT. Nonetheless, discussions are still to be had, and lessons are still to be taught, awareness on the type of city that has been built so far will be the key to new ideas and proposals that might one day change the face of the city.

Gated community in Bogotá. Image by © Author

Gated communities in Bogotá. Images by © Author

1.3 Consequences

A fragmented society

The United Nations stated that this is a "new era" of conflict and violence, where such conflicts are increasingly domestic and less deadly. On a recent satirical article titled To Eradicate Urban Conflict, Eradicate Urban Interaction, written as a memo for a fictitious organization (the North American Alliance for Gated Communities), Ben van Loon (2024) responds:

> "Through principled planning and partnership, we can program our own gated localities of self-governance, negating superfluous social interactions and avoiding conflict as such."

Highlighting throughout the article the absurdity of addressing urban conflict by eliminating the interactions that define urban life. In reality architecture and planning should not aim for enclosed nor fixed spaces, but to generate conditions that let meaning be formed through subjectivities and social practices (Arroyo, 2024).

A city that develops following economics profit and global positioning is a city that fosters inequality and segregation between its residents. There are clear physical, social, and economic implications of an enclaved built environment such as the privatization of space that excludes certain people and strongly controls the behavior of the rest, or the urban insecurity that is not solved but just shifted to other places and other victims; but one of the main problems is the social fracture generated, Muxí (2010) reflects:

> "What, however, is fundamental and unequivocal is that the one who, "neither possesses nor consumes" is the "other", and is dangerous."

Then, the fear towards the other is more than just fear of crime, but also of disagreement or of competition, maybe of change or of rejection. People are progressively more polarized, not being able to coexist with diversity, and slowly getting more isolated.

There is more to this problem than just the gated communities or the shopping malls, the built environment is not the only factor in relation to urban inequality. However, at least regarding these neoliberal products, the role of architects and urban planners have been relegated to dressing up and putting a face to replicated spatial models, to which their occupancy and construction rates have already been previously analyzed by developers (De la Carrera, 2023). Although this issue is also dependent on regulation over real estate and urban developers, it becomes relevant to also rethink the part of the profession and the actual actions that can modify the current panorama.

Working with what we have

It is evident by the global popularity of the gated communities that they respond to a need, despite their worsening negative effects, there are valid motives that led people to access this housing typology. Many people have legitimate concerns about crime, violence, and personal safety, with some seeing gating as a way of achieving a better quality of life, peace of mind, and property value protection. Some residents even argue that living in an enclave has given them a sense of community (although an exclusive one) (Landman, 2020).

It is also pertinent to look at the popularity of other products such as shopping malls. At the beginning shopping malls had a wider service offer (education, culture, health), but they shifted to the current form due to economic interests. They are constantly modernized,

evolving to offer innovative consumption experiences, all while offering comfort and safety. It becomes evident why they are attractive to the people, but public life should not be concentrated on them. Commerce has always been part of urban life, if the issue relies on relegating urban encounters to malls, solutions have to be focused on finding balances for creating quality urban spaces that can coexist with commercial expansion (Mellarez, 2020)

The point is then not to demonize the architectural products or their users, but to understand them; the reasons behind their success, and the negative effects that they have over the city. Not proposing only counter products, but real solutions to the problems that, together with the economic drivers, led to their propagation.

Proposals

Ramón Bermudez is another member of the collective Ciudad Isla; as a professor in collaboration with Sebastian Serna developed an academic architectural studio (MITUO) where the topic was gated communities in Bogotá, encouraging students to develop urban acupuncture projects that use the remaining spaces to introduce new architectural and urban pieces capable of dynamizing the enclaves, without tearing down or replacing the existing structures (Bermúdez Obregón, 2018).

As a personal proposal, he also analyzed the urban elements resulting from the private enclaves, such as the streets, the blocks, the remaining open spaces, and the empty corners. Proposing the placement of new entrances, commerce locals, or public facilities, by taking advantage of regulatory gaps and remaining building capacity; also subdividing the blocks in smaller areas to reduce their scale, to create a more integrated, mixed-use, and inviting ground floor (Bermúdez Obregón, 2021).

Around the growing discussions about the topic of the gated communities in Bogotá other proposals of this nature constantly emerge. Arango De Vengoechea (2023) proposes not only the removal of fences and walls to instead place mixed-uses; but also, an exercise of renaturalization, by recovering ecological connection and public spaces lost to private initiatives; and a reorganization of the road network, playing with different scales to better suit pedestrians and cyclists needs.
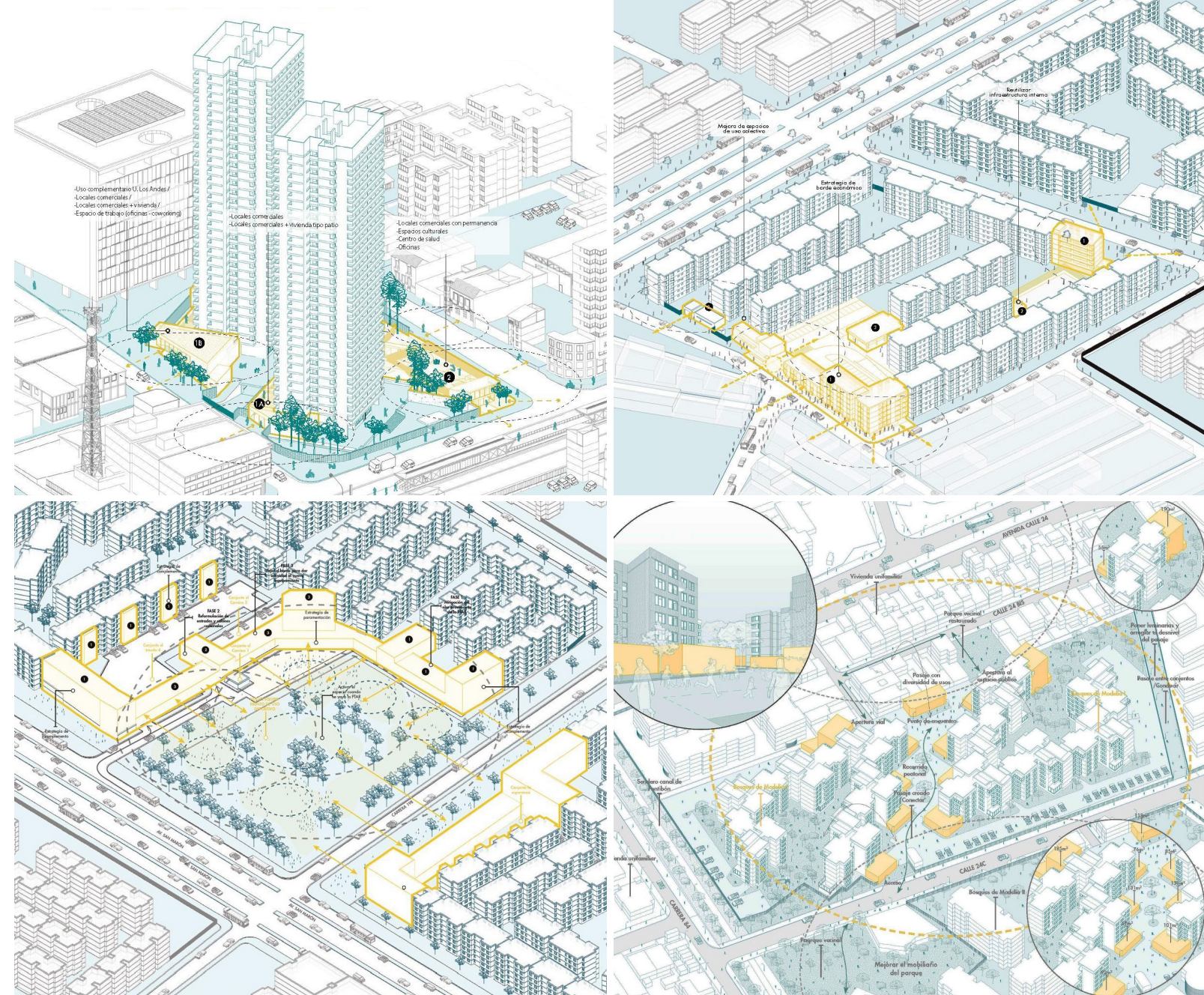
Towards a changing city

Raising awareness and informing is for now one of the most useful tools in hopes of improving a city that needs to evolve. Efforts such as those made by De la Carrera and the Ciudad Isla investigation have sparked reflections and actual changes in the way people think about the impact that enclosing and isolating have on the urban environment. Gated communities are planned for stability and longevity; the goal is for them to take part in their context and integrate with it.

Aldo Rossi (1982) introduced the term "the analogous city" as an urban space composed of fragments, memory, and analogy; a city layered by historical artifacts and evolving typologies that change through unconscious collective will. Bogotá has many faces, and although much of the thesis focuses on understanding the phenomenon of gated communities, the specific aim is to address their disconnection to another big part of the city, the self-built, informally developed areas. It is at these intersections (or lack thereof) between two realities, where the places of higher contrast and inequality are found.

Proposals for the pilot project CIUDAD ISLA. Bermúdez Obregón (2021) © Pilot project CIUDAD ISLA

Chapter II

The Other Face

2.1 Overview
Informal Settlements

General overview on informality

Over a billion people today live in informal settlements globally, and current projections show that these will only continue their expansion, so that by 2050, the number will rise to over three billion. These settlements have had general attention and have been a priority in recent years, although their origin can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century, when cities started to go through large waves of rural to urban migration, particularly in the Global South. This meant better access to employment, education, or healthcare for the arriving population, but at the cost of unplanned infrastructure and services, leading to overcrowding and extreme poverty (Marinic & Meninato, 2022).

When something is done informally it implies that there was a lack of normative, or a formal procedure to its development. In architecture and urbanism, the distinction between formal/informal refers to the urbanization of land outside of planning and regulations. While some informality can generally be found in most cities, the concept of informal settlements identifies entire areas that gradually grew without state constraints and unpremeditated (Roy & Al Sayyad, 2004). The settlements grew with residents living in substandard homes, usually with problems to access sanitation services, electricity, or save drinking water, often also missing security of tenure and land rights, as a consequence being in a constant threat of eviction (Reckford & Aki-Sawyerr, 2024)

For identifying these places terms such as "slums", squatter settlements, or simply informal settlements emerge, often being used as synonyms, but generally employed to differentiate the specific traits of the dwelling according to their livability, legality, and development (Dovey, 2014). Still, discussions about the specific meaning and accuracy of these terms arise, and in more contemporary points of view some are perceived as derogatory, highlighting a shift into understanding informality under other conceptions.

Informality as something to be eliminated

Early responses to the issues brough by urban informality, highly motivated by modernist ideas, contemplated the eradication of the settlements, and blocks of state-led modern social housing as a solution for the housing crisis. Fortunately, towards the 1980's, these methods started to be questioned as they proved to be an inefficient response to the issue, facing criticism for their poor quality, social disconnection, and cultural mismatches (Meninato, 2022).

The British architect John F.C. Turner is largely referred to due to his offer of a radical change; after visiting various Latin American countries, he developed a critique towards the centralized housing production, remarking how essential it is to include people in the development processes, abandoning the idea delivering housing as a finished product, but rather providing financial help and infrastructure for the residents to independently built their environment and their communities (Pasta, 2020).
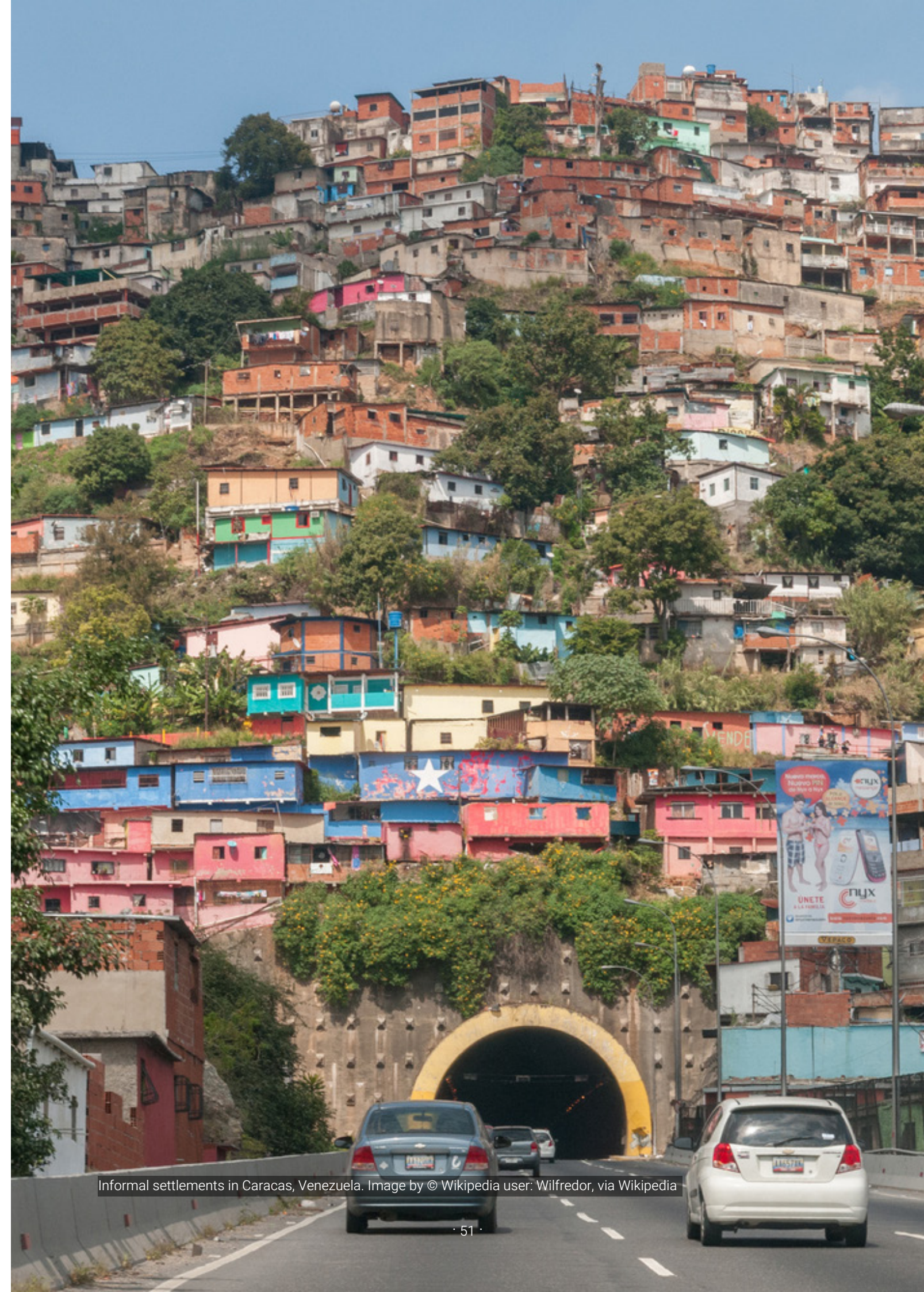
Informal settlements in Caracas, Venezuela. Image by © Wikipedia user: Wilfredor, via Wikipedia

New perspectives

Ananya Roy (2005) argues that informality is not an exception but a dominant mode of urbanization, actively produced by state actions and regulatory decisions. She emphasizes that informal housing and markets serve not only the poor but also the middle-class and the elite. An example being upscale housing developments (such as gated communities), that although they may have legal land ownership, they sometimes violate zoning, land use, or building regulations, blurring the lines between legality and illegality.

Recent approaches shift from seeing informal settlements as areas to be improved, to understanding how informality might reveal strategies for appropriating of the city and give the people the power to shape it. Currents such as Tactical Urbanism have emerged, exploring short-term, small-scale interventions with high citizen participation that help reinterpret the remaining and abandoned spaces left from formal urbanism; a famous example is Zwischennutzung (temporary use) in Berlin, a temporal appropriation of empty spaces placing playgrounds, bars, or artistic venues (Martinelli, 2022).

Informality is not limited to the settlements, it goes beyond, into economic and social matters. People find solutions to their everyday problems through informal micro-enterprises or informal transport, both in the Global South and Global North (Kamalipour, 2022). Situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic proved that cities need to be able to adapt and transform.

Many of the formal urban planning have failed to address the needs of a part of the population. The necessary shift is then to stop thinking of informality as the contrary of urbanism, but as an essential counterpart. Learning from it may uncover new models that incorporate complexity and self-organization (Mitchell, 2022), offering lessons around issues of resistance and distributive justice (Roy, 2005), guiding to a fairer and more inclusive urban planning.

Urban informality in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean is the most unequal region in the world. The richest 10% of the population have on average 12 times higher incomes than the poorest 10%, while the average for developed countries in the OECD is 4 times higher. Moreover, one in five inhabitants of the region is classified as poor (BID, 2024). Additionally, of the approximately 600 million people living in the region, around 120 million live in settlements with inadequate or informal housing (López, 2022).

Major cities like Bogotá, Caracas, or Lima have high rates of informal housing. These settlements are usually located on marginal, peri-urban, or environmentally risky lands, areas that are usually excluded from the city planning priorities, making infrastructure provision more difficult and costly. This leads to limited connectivity with the rest of the city, making job-seeking and general access to services more expensive and time-consuming, increasing the vulnerability of the residents in the informal settlements. Besides, these zones face stigmatization, as they are seen as dangerous or illegitimate (Clichevsky, 2000).

One of the more used methods to address urban informality in the region is formalization/legalization, under the idea that giving legal property titles to the people will reduce poverty by enabling their participation in the formal market. Ananya Roy (2005) identifies some problems that arise with this approach, as it often involves conflict and may reinforce inequality; multiple claims may exist over the same land and formal titles are given to just one part of the residents. Moreover, informality is already marketized; people buy, sell, and rent property informally, and giving them a title does not guarantee access to loans or financial security. Additionally, many of the residents of these settlements have irregular incomes and struggle with rigid payment schedules.

Although formalization processes may be constrained by limited institutional coordination and economic resources, slow implementation, and minimal urban integration, once a neighborhood is legalized it faces a risk of displacement. Many areas that were once considered 'illegal' and located on the urban periphery have become part of the inner city as urban expansion progressed. In these cases, zoning regulations, urban policies that favor commercial and high-end residential developments, and the rising value of previously stigmatized or underused land can trigger gentrification, ultimately leading to the expulsion of low-income populations (Clichevsky, 2000).

A sudden full legalization is not equivalent to a redistribution of wealthless. Instead, adaptive approaches and incremental security of tenure can protect the most vulnerable and prevent formalization becoming a tool of exclusion or gentrification (Roy, 2005). More contemporary actions focus on a participatory and progressive improvement of informal settlements, examples such as the Favela-Bairro program in Rio de Janeiro or the Social Urbanism in Medellín (chapter 3, p. 106-107) show different solutions that come from responding to people's needs, rather than replacing the settlements (Meninato, 2022).

Social Urbanism intervention in informal settlements in Medellín, Colombia. Image by © Simón Gallego

2.2 Informal city
Case study Bogotá

Although it is relevant to understand informality in the context of Bogotá, the focus of the thesis is the disconnection between the gated communities and these neighborhoods in the places where they meet. This section will only give a short overview of the informal settlements in the city before exploring how the city works between both urban typologies.

Short history of the informality in the city

"La violencia trajo a Bogotá millones de personas y ellas iniciaron el proceso de la urbanización desordenada (…) Tal vez el ancestro campesino de las gentes hizo que rechazaran las casas de inquilinato y que buscaran la luz y el aire, de manera que se fueron hacia esos sitios"

"Violence brought millions of people to Bogotá, and they began the process of disorganized urbanization (…) Perhaps the rural background of the people made them reject tenement housing and seek light and air, so they moved to those areas."

- Hisnardo Ardila Díaz, mayor of Bogotá, 1984-1985. From Mosca (1987)

More than a third part of the present-day Bogotá was self-built by its residents. Informal settlements go back to the end of the 19th century in the periphery of the historical center. As the city expanded in the first half of the 20th century, working-class neighborhoods were founded as a solution to informal urbanization, providing quality housing to low-income families. However, between the 1950's and the 1960's the city kept an exponential growth, and the periphery expanded beyond the edges of the city, starting to reach natural borders including the cerros tutelares[1] (Monserrate and Guadalupe hills) in the east, and rivers such as the San Francisco, San Agustín, and the Bogotá River (Valencia Tobón, 2023; Niño Murcia et al, 2023).

The rapid urban growth that happened as a response to a failed industrialization, rural violence, and massive migration into the cities, produced a model that favored the commodification of the land, excluding those who could not access the formal housing

1. Monserrate and Guadalupe hills are part of the Eastern Hills (Cerros Orientales), a chain of hills forming the natural boundary of the city.
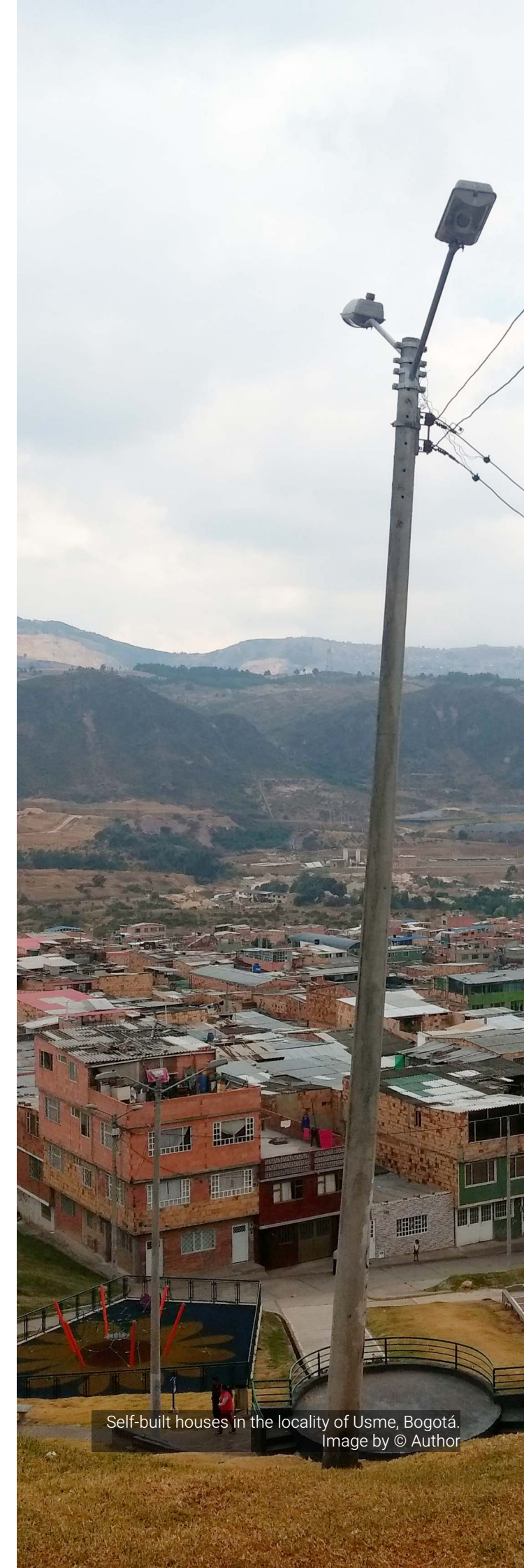
Self-built houses in the locality of Usme, Bogotá. Image by © Author

market. The urbanization was then guided by modernist principles, functionalism, zoning, and rational designs that ignore the spontaneous city represented by the informal settlements. Then, during the 1990's when the state moved the responsibility of housing provision to the private market, speculation and infrastructure investments went to benefit only the more affluent, while during this period the state also promoted formalization in informal settlements, as stated by Roy, it was oriented to integrate the poor into the market rather than guaranteeing their rights to the city, further marginalizing the population, and deepening spatial fragmentation and polarization (Zuluaga & Grisales Vargas, 2020).

As social housing policies and formalization fell short in providing a formal solution to the growing city, recent district administrations have taken other approaches to provide dignified living conditions and upgrading the urban quality in informal neighborhoods. The strategies taken are highly influenced by the Social Urbanism program in Medellín, improving transportation and giving access to facilities. As a response to the physical disconnection to the city, resulting in daily long commutes, the Transmicable (elevated cable cars) was constructed in the locality of Ciudad Bolivar (and will be later implemented in other localities). Other actions focus on the participatory design and construction of new services, facilities, and public spaces; even opening the Museum of the Self-Built City, in hopes of recognizing the social processes and the territory that shaped a significant part of Bogotá (Valencia Tobón, 2023; Niño Murcia et al, 2023).

Segregation in the city

Mayorga Henao and Ortiz Véliz (2020) studied the inequalities and segregation in Bogotá regarding the access to education, culture, and recreational services through a quantitative territorial and statistical analysis. It was concluded that zones classified to have a lower basic quality of life indicator (ICVB), usually located in the peripheries, have a high segregation rate, yet the zones with a high ICVB are even more segregated. This shows how upper-class groups, through their economic capacity, isolate themselves in the more exclusive areas.

Given that Bogotá is a highly segregated city, the analysis will now focus on whether, and in what ways, this segregation extends between gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods.

Mapping the informal settlements in Bogotá

There is a marked contrast between the inner city and the periphery in terms of the location of clandestine neighborhoods, as well as a more subtle, yet evident, divide between the north and south, both particularly visible in more recent developments (map 3). The map makes evident the spatial magnitude of informal housing in Bogotá, and hints the weight that informality still has in shaping the city.

In despite of the existing contrasts regarding the location of informal settlements in the city, at a closer look it is evident that Bogotá is made by patches of different typologies. As mentioned before, clandestine neighborhoods that were once on the periphery are now inside of the city, they consolidated as the city continued its growth through other urban forms. At the time when gated communities were growing, the informally developed areas were already there, forcing a coexistence between two very different ways of making city.

Although the analysis focuses on Bogotá's limits, gated communities have been also growing in the metropolitan area of the city, adjusting to different contexts.

Map 3. Number of informal settlements in Bogotá by locality. Drawn by author. Source: SDP 2025, Luis Carlos Jiménez, Daniela Romero, Walter López Borbón, Andrés Del Portillo. (Niño Murcia et al, 2023)
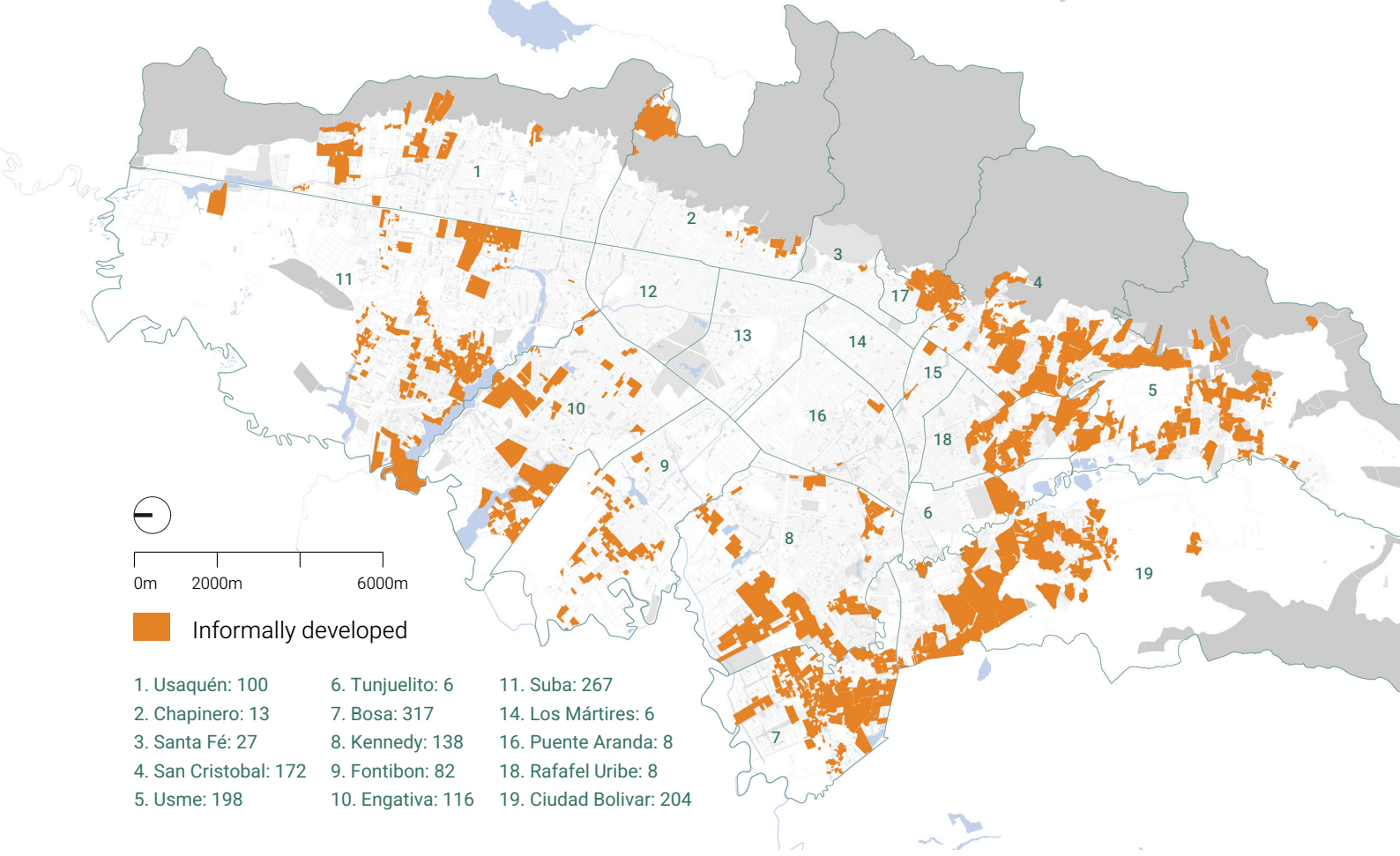
Informally developed

1. Usaquén: 100	6. Tunjuelito: 6	11. Suba: 267
2. Chapinero: 13	7. Bosa: 317	14. Los Mártires: 6
3. Santa Fé: 27	8. Kennedy: 138	16. Puente Aranda: 8
4. San Cristobal: 172	9. Fontibon: 82	18. Rafael Uribe: 8
5. Usme: 198	10. Engativa: 116	19. Ciudad Bolivar: 204

Legend

— Territorial division by "localities"
⬜ Cerros Orientales (Eastern Hills)

Gated communities for period of construction

- 1949-1960
- 1961-1970
- 1971-1980
- 1981-1990
- 1991-2000
- 2001-2011
- 2012-2022

Informal settlements for period of development

- Until 1960
- 1961-1972
- 1972-1979
- 1980-1987
- 1988-1999
- 2000-2025

0m 1000m   6000m

Map 4. Historical development of gated communities vs. informal settlements in Bogotá. Drawn by Author.
Source: Fernando de la Carrera (2023), UAECD 2013, SDP 2025, Luis Carlos Jiménez, Daniela Romero, (Niño Murcia et al, 2023)

Spatial proximity

The map shows that in most areas where both types of neighborhoods meet, informal settlements appeared before gated communities. Gated enclaves are primarily located in the northern and western parts of the city, with the northern ones being home to wealthier residents compared to the more peripheral areas. Over the past decade, low-income gated communities have gained ground, particularly in the south-west of the city. While both types often overlap, there are still central areas where gated communities exist without near informal neighborhoods.

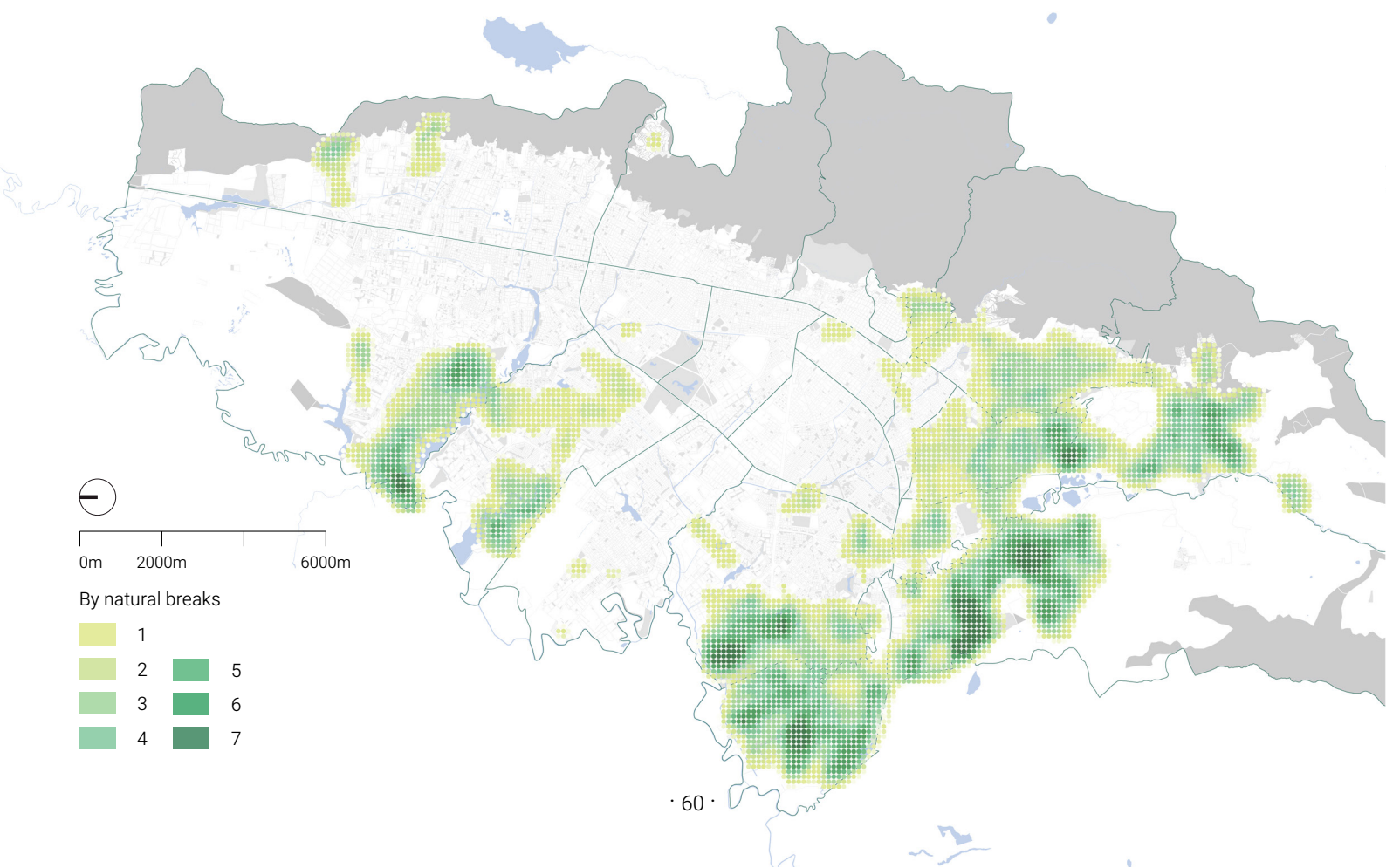## Population and economic relationships

Understanding the population helps identify the gaps and inequalities between the lower and upper classes. Analyzing maps about how poverty, population density, and job offers are distributed across the city, and looking into the economic relationships that emerge behind the apparent separation will reveal how different groups interact economically and what kinds of dependencies or social fragmentations exist within the duality between gated communities and the informally developed city.

As mentioned before, poverty is mostly found on the periphery of the city, predominantly in the west and the south (map 5), and that is not only economical poverty, but also represents the difficulty to access education, jobs, health, and public services.

Jobs and economic units concentrate towards the center in two axes, one towards the north and the other one towards the airport in the west (map 6), translating into less physical barriers to access employment to the population near those areas as they have less commuting time and transportation expenses, and more options for moving around the city. At the same time, it represents longer commute distances to the people in the peripheries, where most informal settlements converge, implying a greater effort for the most vulnerable population, as well as a decrease in their leisure and resting time.

Adding how the population density is distributed (map 7), showing similar patterns as the multidimensional poverty, the urban segregation becomes clear: more people reside in the more vulnerable areas, far from the economic opportunities.
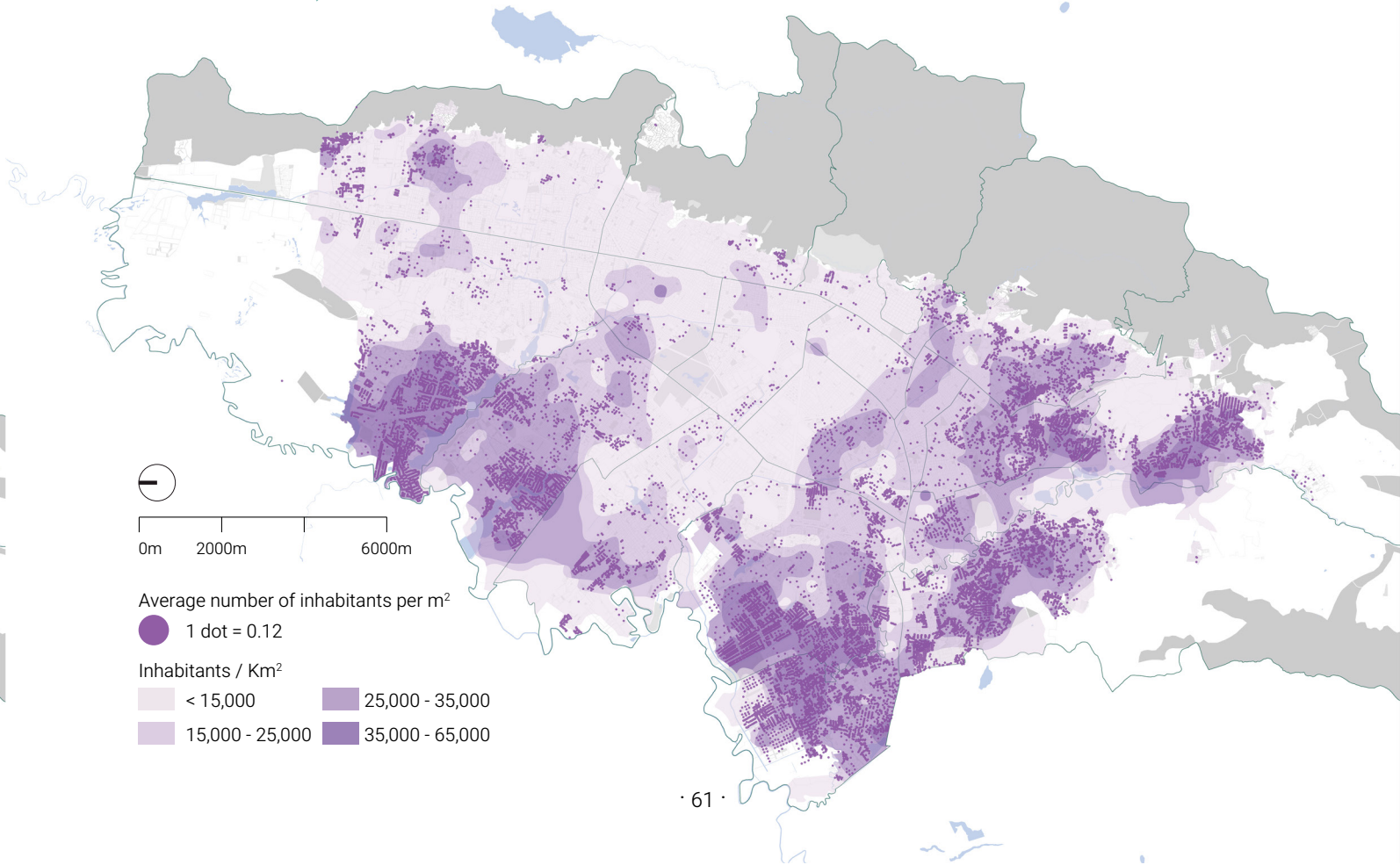

Map 6. Jobs for Km² and Quantity of "Unidades Economicas" (economic units), 2021. Drawn by author. Source: Grupo de sostenibilidad UniAndes, Journal of Transport and Land Use, Popul Environ. Gúzman et al. DANE

Jobs / Km²
- < 2,500
- 2,500 - 7,500
- 7,500 - 15,000
- 15,000 - 30,000
- 30,000 - 45,000
- 1 dot = 90 economic units*

*An economic unit is a natural or juridic person that carries out an economic activity in one of four (4) types: fixed establishment, semi-fixed, housing or mobile posts.

Map 5. Population density by Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in Bogotá. Drawn by author. Source: SDP (DANE - CNPV 2018, EM 2017, SISBEN 4 2020)

By natural breaks
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
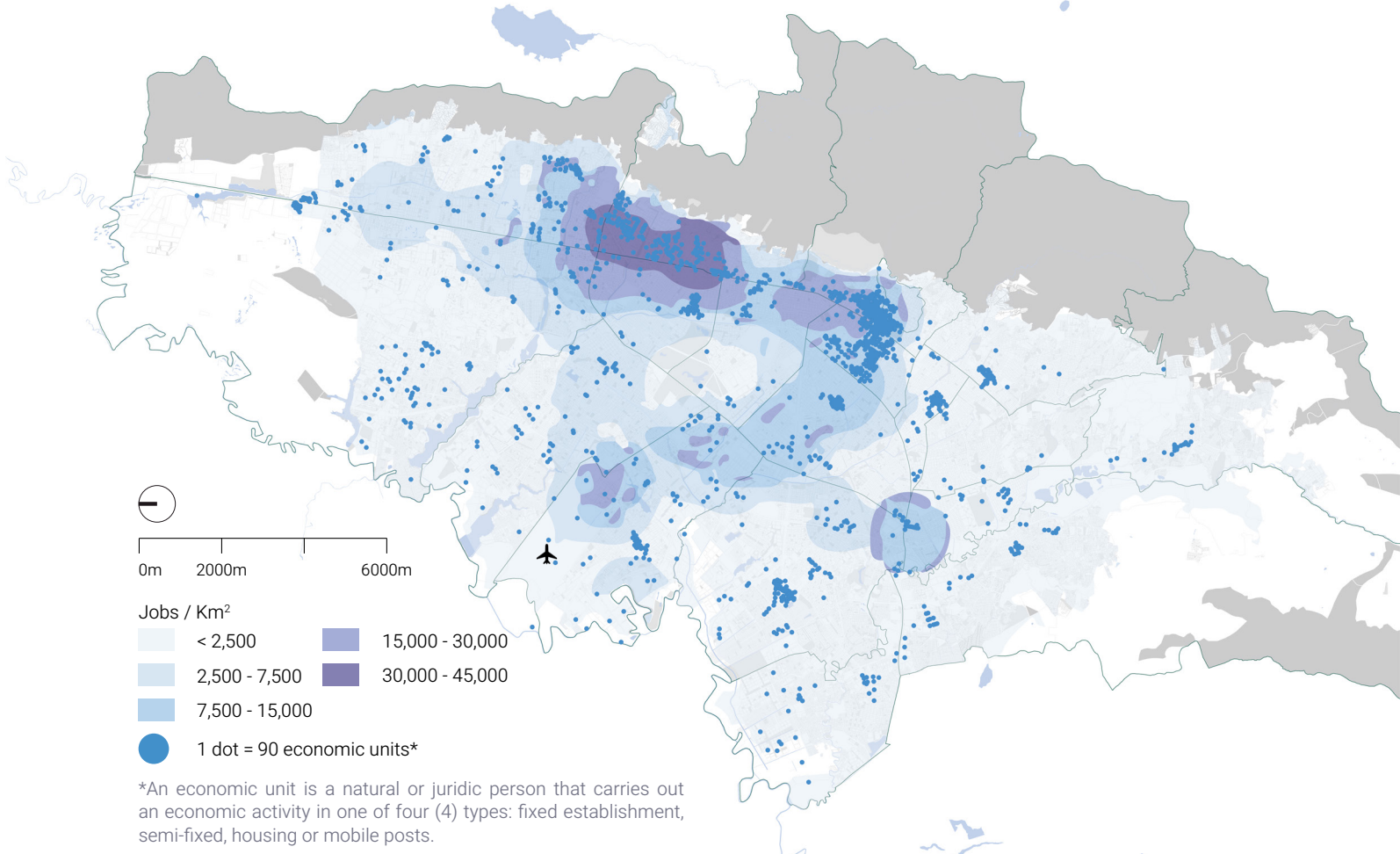
Map 7. Population density by inhabitants per Km² and by average number of inhabitants per m² by block, 2018. Drawn by author. Source: Grupo de sostenibilidad UniAndes, Journal of Transport and Land Use, Popul Environ. Gúzman et al. DANE - CNPV 2018)

Average number of inhabitants per m²
- 1 dot = 0.12

Inhabitants / Km²
- < 15,000
- 15,000 - 25,000
- 25,000 - 35,000
- 35,000 - 65,000

· 60 ·

· 61 ·

Low-income gated communities (social housing) facing informally developed areas in the locality of Bosa, Bogotá. Image by © Revista Dearq

Seeing how most gated communities are located towards the north of the city, in areas of higher socio-economic status, they are evidently favored in how the economic segregation works in Bogotá. However, that difference is not universal to the typology, as the residents of gated communities located near the peripheries are also exposed to long commutes and more difficulties to access near jobs, with the fences and other physical separation being the principal contrast between the populations of both typologies living in the most vulnerable areas.

Apart from these boundaries and city-wide econimical disparities, a complex web of economic interdependence exists between socio-economic classes. Formal and informal workers play essential roles within the gated communities of all around the city, providing domestic labor, maintenance, security, and other services.

One of the most representative examples in Bogotá is domestic labor, a job predominantly held by women, often residing in more marginalized neighborhoods. These workers have to transit the city from its periphery to the areas with higher "estratos", placing them in a situation of "otherness" for their residence zone, their social class, and the type of work they have, reinforcing segregation and discrimination to women providing a service (Fleischer & Marín, 2019).

Meanwhile, in many areas of the city, small-scale businesses and informal economies often emerge around the perimeters of enclosed residential zones. They frequently appear in response to the need and consumption patterns of the residents within the gated enclaves. Street vendors, informal food stalls, motorcycle taxis, and corner shops are found

outside the gates and their adjacent roads, creating unplanned and dynamic interactions.

Given the high proportion of informally employed people in the city, street vendors describe their activities as an essential source of their economic capacity, being in many cases the only income they have to support their families, giving them a certain degree of independence and flexibility, but facing instability, changing conditions and the constant risk of confiscation. In the other side, buyers of these services usually value the proximity and accessibility to the services that informality provides, facilitating availability when commuting, and often building loyalty relationships to some vendors due to constant interaction (Moncada Gómez & Ordóñez Argote, 2018).

This reveals how in the zones where gated communities meet with informal labor a threshold space emerges, characterized by a layered and paradoxical interaction where behind the barriers meant to separate, an economic interchange continues below. As commodified exchanges become the main contact points between two populations, it reinforces a hierarchical urban order inscribed into neoliberal logics rather than promoting shared public life and civic connections.

They are not examples of integration, but they do evidence coexistence. Recognizing this challenges the narrative of urban isolation and opens up spaces for architecture and planning to build upon those interactions, not supporting the market logic, but transforming that proximity into new relationships.

Left to right:

Protest for domestic workers' rights. Image by © Diego Cuevas , via El País

Street vendors and motorcycle taxis next to gated communities in the locality of Bosa, Bogotá. Image by © Revista Dearq

Public space and infrastructure access

Other drive of segregation in the city is the access to infrastructure such as public transportation, facilities, and public space. The way in which this accessibility is organized and distributed in the city gives a broader picture of how it reflects in the duality between gated communities and the informally developed city.
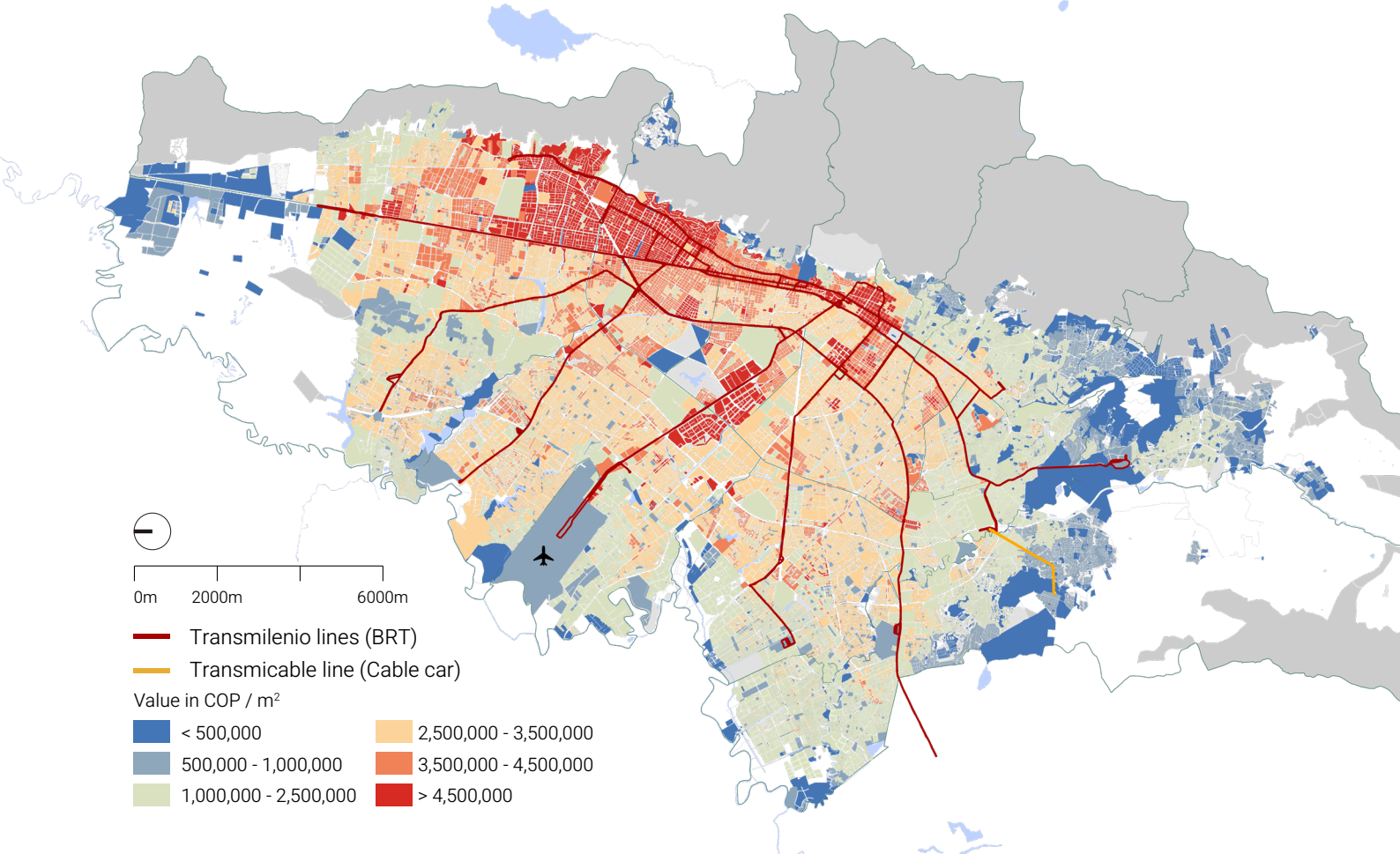
The integrated public transportation system of Bogotá integrates massive transportation of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), bus routes, and until the year 2025 one cable car line. As represented in the map 8, the proximity to the mass transit system Transmilenio (BRT) impacts the housing prices in the city. While for more affluent areas located in the axes from the center towards the north and the airport it usually means a general increase of land prices, in peripheral areas it usually means a higher differentiation of prices, increasing segregation (Amézquita García et al, 2017). In addition, the lack of access to opportunities and facilities further devaluates these zones.

The map on access to educational, cultural, and recreational facilities (map 9) also evidences the disparities between higher and lower classes. While towards the south-east of the city there is more access to these kinds of facilities due to more recent projects, there is still a noticeable contrast between the east and the western peripheries, continuing the spatial patterns recognized in the population and economic analysis. The limited access to educational, cultural, and recreational facilities limits the opportunities of their inhabitants to socially integrate and improve their quality of life (Mayorga Henao & Ortiz Veliz, 2020).

Gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods in the locality of San Cristobal, Bogotá. Image by © Author


Map 8. Public Transportation Network in Bogotá: Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Cable Car Line vs. Land reference value (m²) per block 2025. Drawn by author. Source: UAECD, Datos Abiertos Transmilenio

0m   2000m   6000m

— Transmilenio lines (BRT)
— Transmicable line (Cable car)

Value in COP / m²

- < 500,000
- 500,000 - 1,000,000
- 1,000,000 - 2,500,000
- 2,500,000 - 3,500,000
- 3,500,000 - 4,500,000
- > 4,500,000

Map 9. Accessibility to educational, sports, and cultural facilities in Bogotá. Source: (Mayorga Henao & Ortiz Véliz, 2020).

0m   2000m   6000m

Low accesibility
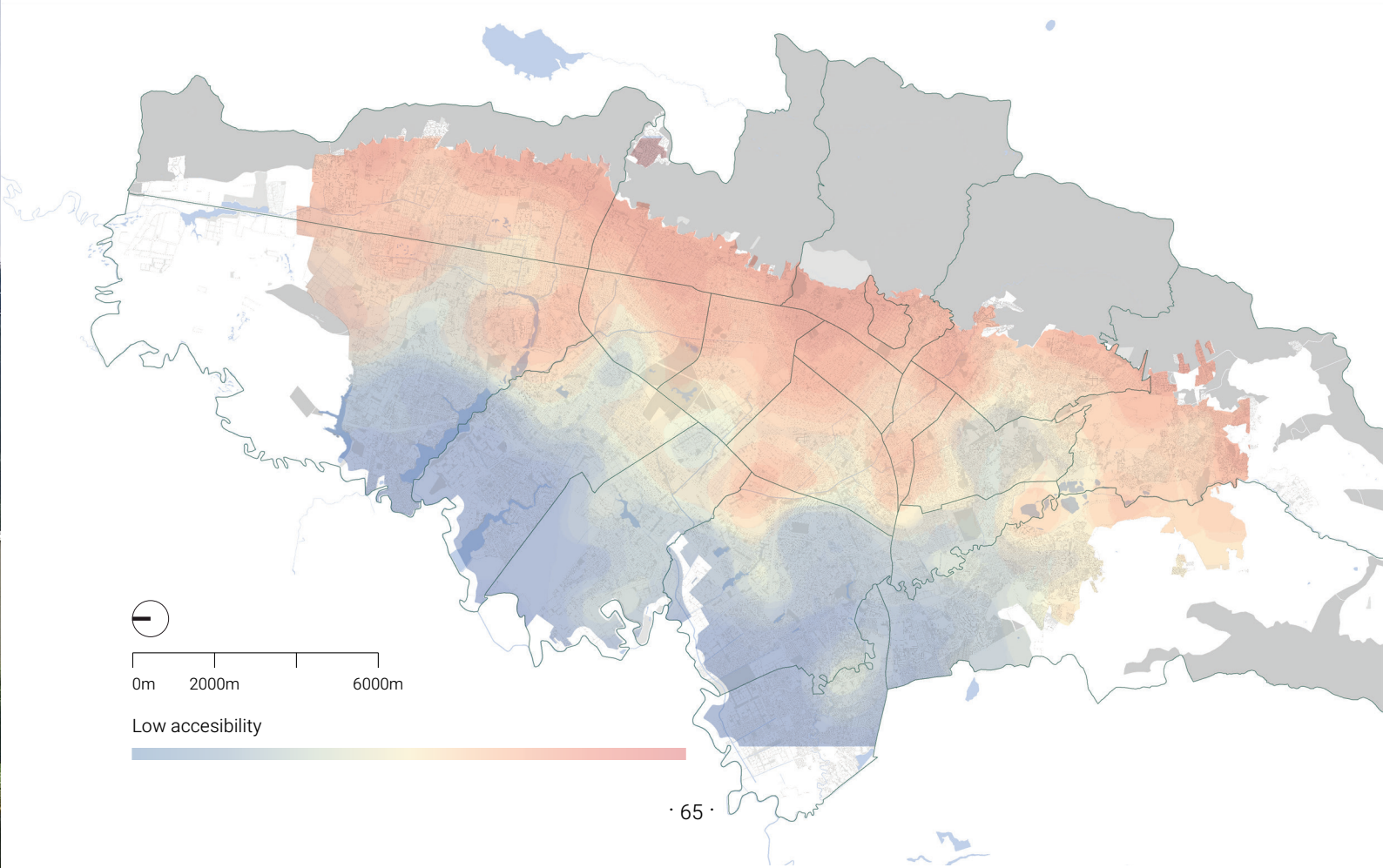
Map 10. Public space indicator for Bogotá - m² per inhabitant. Source: (Mayorga Henao & Hernández, 2018).

Parks and public space
m² / inhabitant

Until 2 m²
2 - 4 m²
4 - 6 m²
6 - 10 m²
> 10 m²
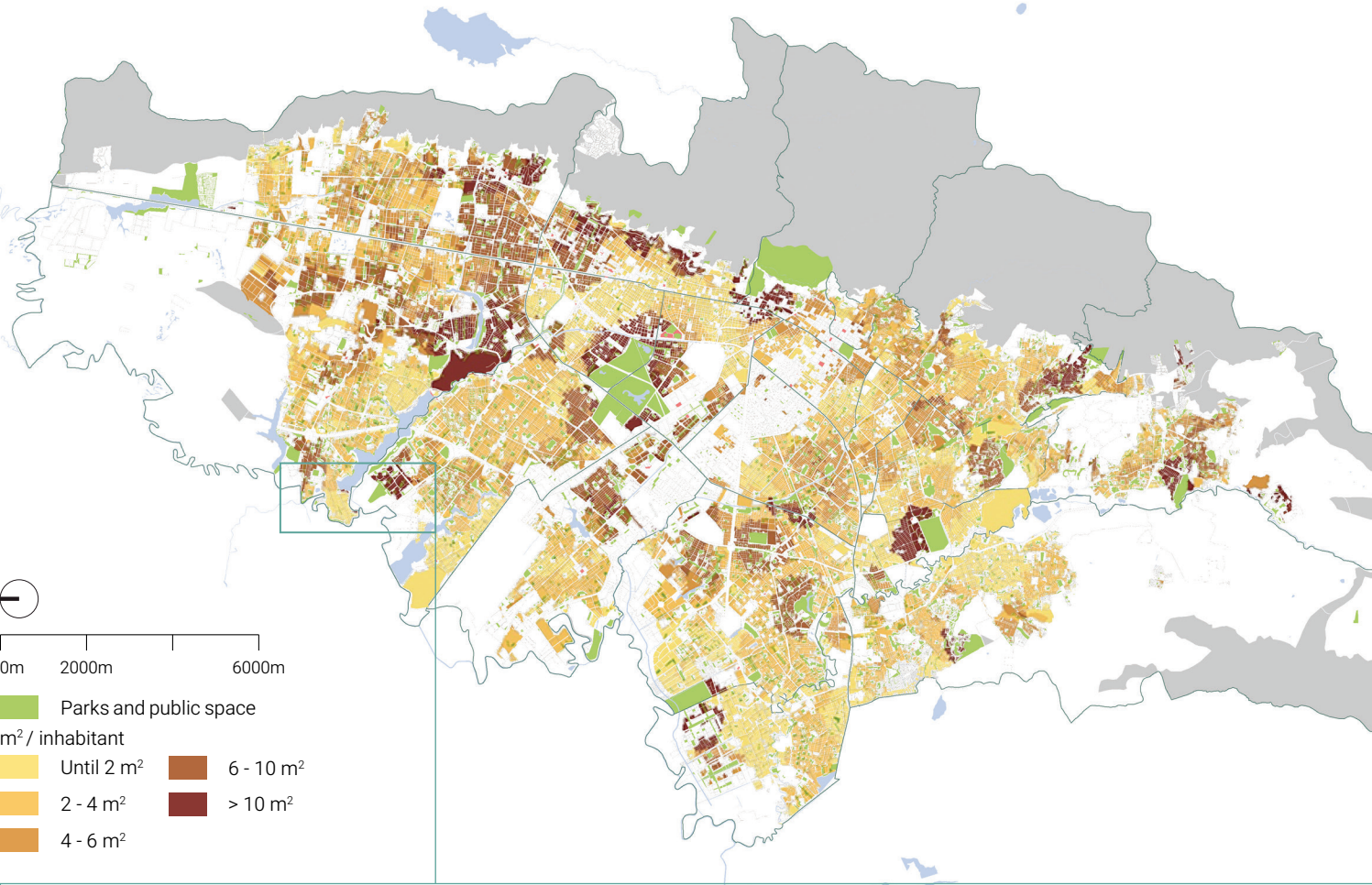
Accessibility to public space is also an important issue when looking at the inequalities in Bogotá. The city has generally a low quantity of public space with less than 4 m2 per inhabitant on average. Areas with more coverage correspond with the greatest parks (map 10), evidencing how the smallest public spaces are insufficient for the amount of people they serve (Mayorga Henao & Hernández, 2018). In the map it is also evident that there is a difference between the north and the south-western peripheries, hinting how the informally developed city lacks enough public space, in contrast to other planned neighborhoods.

Due to the ease with which gated communities can be replicated for various socio-economic groups, many new developments are located near marginalized areas, which also face challenges in accessing services and facilities. As noted earlier, in Bogotá, gating is not exclusive to the affluent, and spatial segregation extends beyond housing typologies. Despite the clear urban disparities between wealthy and lower-income areas, this dynamic does not necessarily apply between gated communities and informal settlements. Higher socio-economic gated enclaves remain as segregated from the informal city as to other lower-status closed developments. This raises the question of how gated communities contribute to processes of separation and isolation, even within areas of similar socio-economic profiles.

Difference in access
to public space
between Tibabuyes and
Ciudadela Colsubsidio,
Bogotá.
Image taken from
Google Earth, 2021

Physical separation and urban form

In most of the city, the places where both typologies meet work as a series of patches, being adjacent without a clear boundary separating them. The divisions are on a smaller scale, with fences or walls surrounding the specific developments isolating them from their surroundings. However, with Bogotá's socio-economic segregation, the physical separation takes different directions inside that general scenario. For better understanding these, three zones of the city will be modeled and mapped; these differ by socio-economic diversity, physical boundaries, and by the period of their development.

The three areas are classified as:

- Strong Physical Division: For zones of the city that due to the recent mass development of gated communities (usually in peripheric areas), there is a sharp boundary between them and the previously existing informal neighborhoods. These do not have a big difference in socio-economic level or "estrato", since the recent projects are mostly VIS / VIP[2] for low-income families.
- High Inequalities: For zones of the city where high contrasts of socio-economic level are present. These areas are usually in the hills, where the terrains were once less regulated leading to informally developed neighborhoods, and at the same time the slope provides more isolation from the city, leading to elite gated communities. Both typologies are very close to each other, but very divided.
- Consolidated: For zones of the city where informal neighborhoods were developed very early in the city's growth, then they were legalized, and as gated communities appeared in their surroundings, they integrated into the city. These areas are still divided both physically and economically, but more moderately in comparison to the other two categories.

Consolidated
High Inequalities

Strong Physical Division
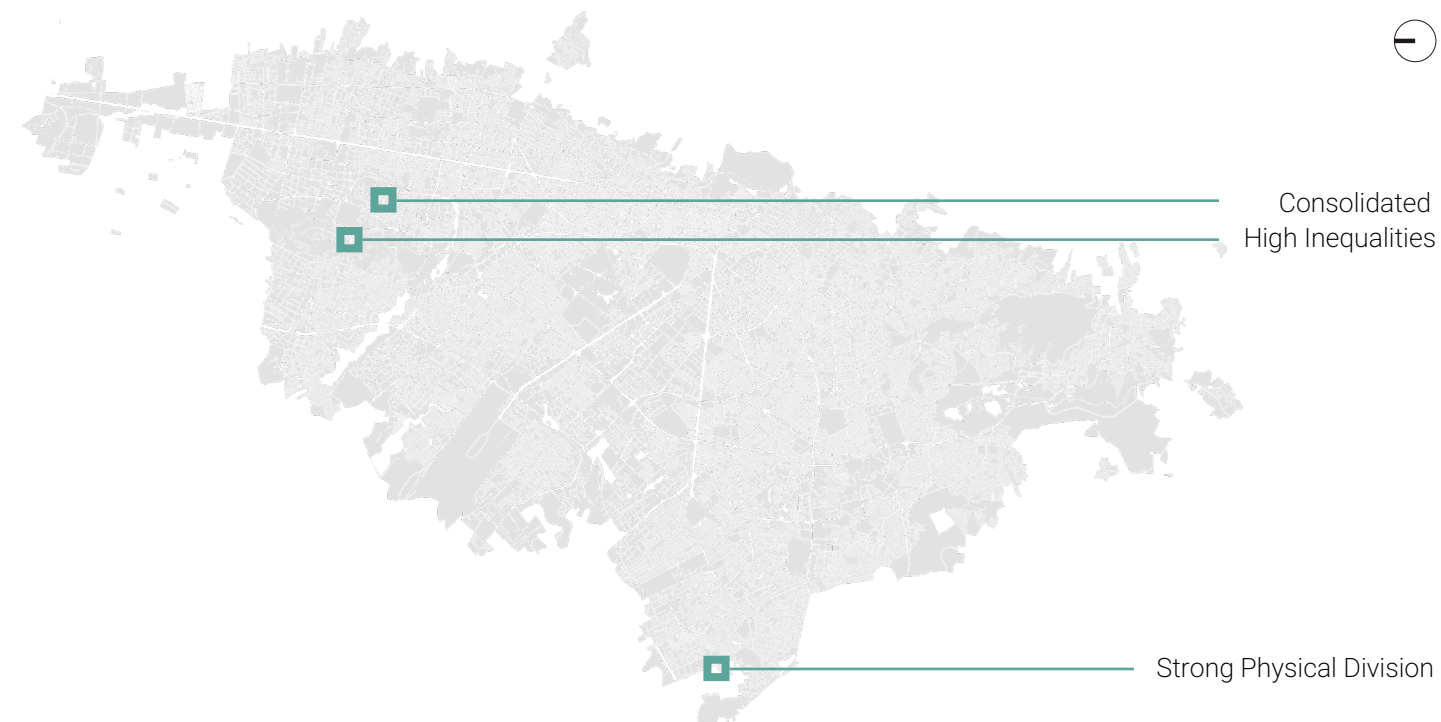
2. VIS: Vivienda de interés social (Social housing); VIP: Vivienda de interés prioritario (Priority social housing.

* (Page 69). UPL: Unidad de Planeación Local (Local Planning Unit) is a sub-division of Bogotá's localities implemneted in the 2022 POT. Equally, they are sub-divided into neighborhoods.

Potreritos: Strong Physical Division
Picture in Potreritos, UPL* Porvenir & Edén, Bogotá. Image taken from Google Street View

Suba Urbano: High Inequalities
Picture in Suba Urbano, UPL* Suba & Britalia, Bogotá. Image by © Jesús Castañeda (visual motion)

Ciudad Jardín Norte: Consolidated
Picture in Ciudad Jardín Norte, UPL* Niza, Bogotá. Image by © Author

**Neighborhood
Potreritos**

*Axonometry in
Potreritos, Bogotá.
Drawn by © Author*

Informally developed housing

Gated communities

Fences / Walls

**Neighborhood
Suba Urbano**

*Axonometry in Suba
Urbano, Bogotá.
Drawn by © Author*

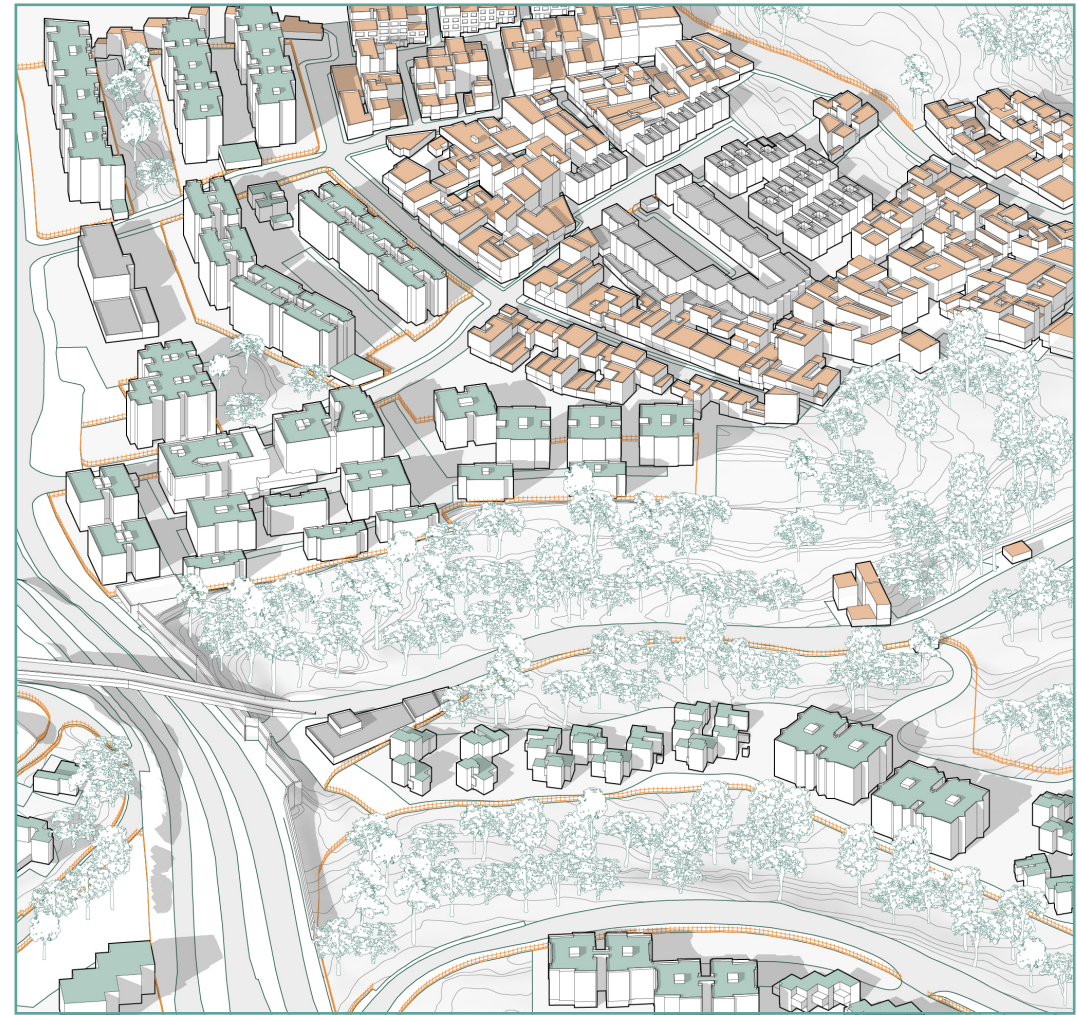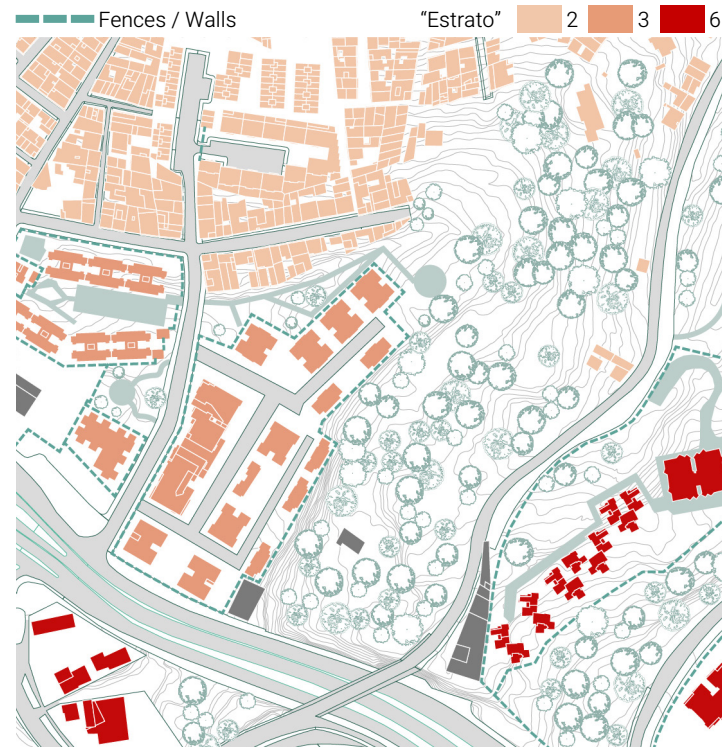Informally developed housing

Gated communities

Fences / Walls
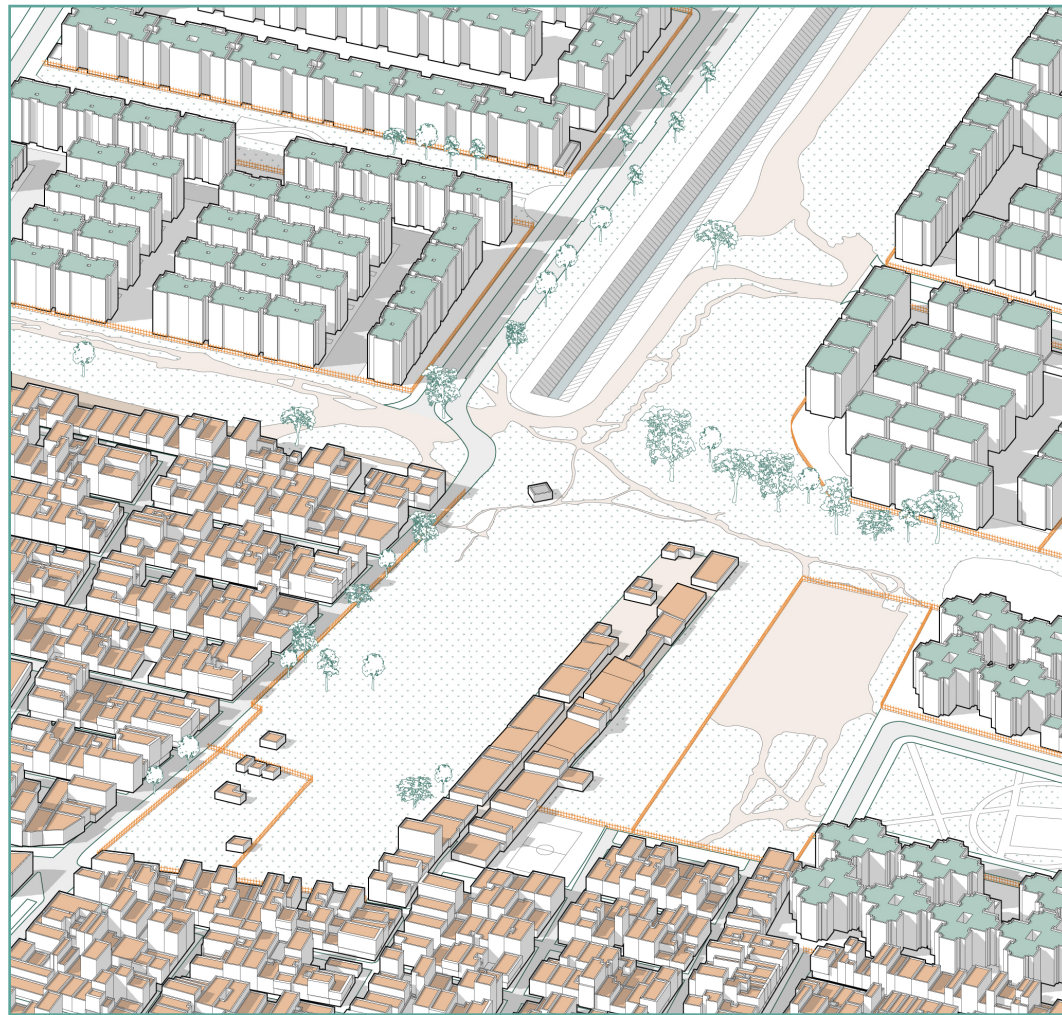
In recent years, as a response to housing shortage, urban planning has led to mass projects of entire neighborhoods in the city peripheries composed only of gated communities. For Potreritos, an informally developed neighborhood in the locality of Bosa, in the south of the city, these new projects meant land dispossession and the imposition of an urban model that lacks adaptability and integration with the preexisting city. Although there is not a big difference regarding socio-economic level in the area, it leads to an even further isolation from the rest of the city for its residents.

In the hills of the locality of Suba, there are gated communities for the elite, larger and more luxurious than typical city developments, accessible only by car. Nearby, in the upper areas of the hills and there even before, there are informal neighborhoods. Both are isolated from the city, but the residents of the upper-class enclaves don't need public transport or proper sidewalks to go up the slopes. In Suba Urbano, middle-class closed developments are closer to main roads, almost hiding the informal settlements. This area highlights how, despite spatial proximity, economic disparity is the primary driver of exclusion.

Fences / Walls   "Estrato"   1   2

Fences / Walls   "Estrato"   2   3   6

Aerial picture. Image from Google Earth

Nolli with distinction by "estrato". Drawn by © Author

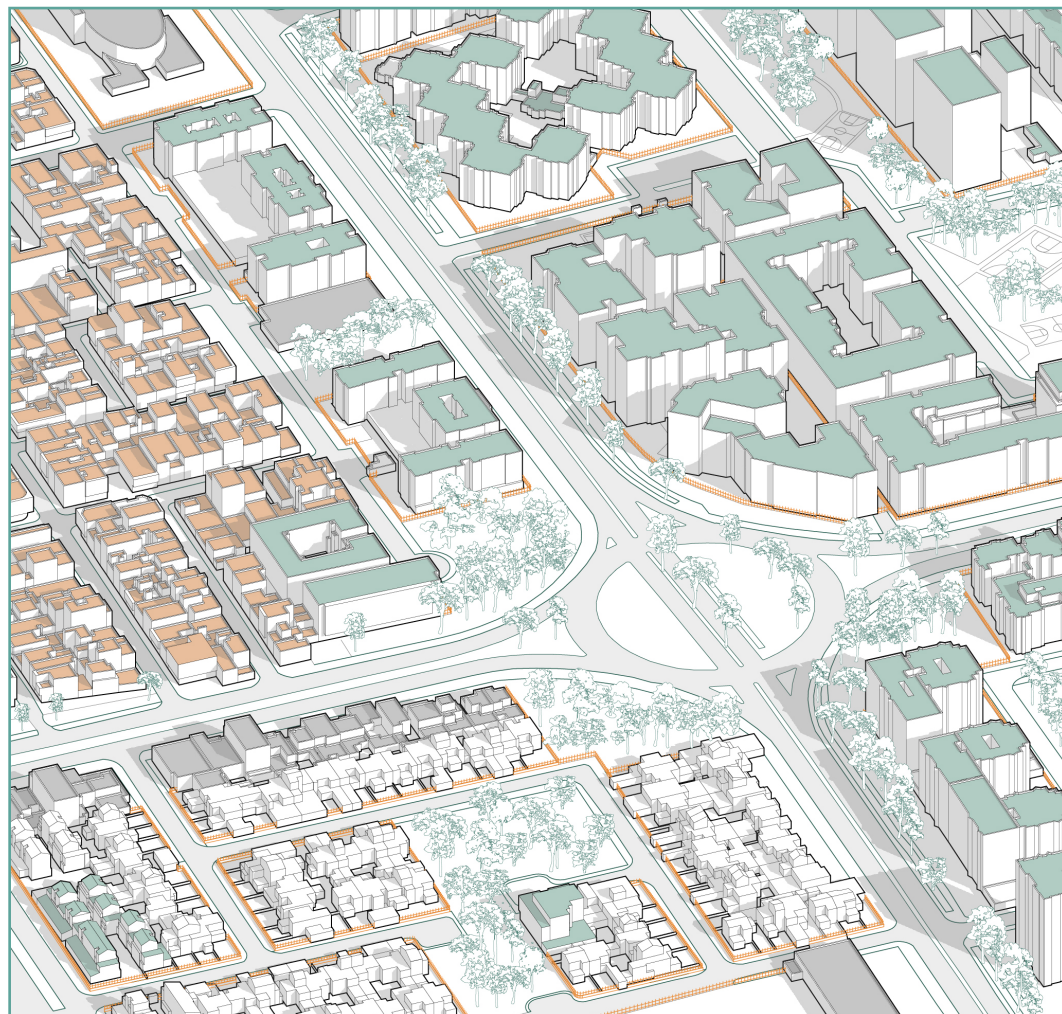Nolli with distinction by "estrato". Drawn by © Author

Aerial picture. Image from Google Earth

**Neighborhood
Ciudad Jardín Norte**

Axonometry in Ciudad
Jardín Norte, Bogotá.
Drawn by © Author

☐ Informally developed
   housing
☐ Gated communities
▦ Fences / Walls

Ciudad Jardín Norte, one of the earliest informally developed neighborhoods in the city's north, faced pressure to adapt as upper-class housing and gated communities emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Over time, it has become more consolidated and integrated, though the discontinuity of its streets remains, and the neighborhood is in a way hidden behind newer developments. In despite of the clear physical contrast between typologies, it is interesting that due to cheaper services and goods, residents from the surroundings approach the neighborhood (see page 73). Most of the division is originated in the way fences isolate each closed enclave from everything in their surroundings.

(see page 73)

Fences / Walls   "Estrato"   3   4   5

Aerial picture. Image from Google Earth

Nolli with distinction by "estrato". Drawn by © Author

Social dynamics and perceptions

The previous chapter explored the causes behind the emergence of gated communities. While economic benefit was the main driver for real estate developers to continue the model, providing easy replicability that mixed with the banks and government strategies became a profitable cycle; it was social imaginaries such as fear of crime, desire for differentiation, or aspirations to a better life some of the most evident motives for users to access this type of housing. Although in many cases, since some were built as social housing, its residents did not have many options.

It is therefore relevant to explore how people living in informally developed neighborhoods perceive their coexistence with surrounding upper-class gated communities. In a short study by López Rodríguez and Londoño Méndez (2021) on Ciudad Jardín Norte, an informally developed neighborhood in northern Bogotá, currently classified as 'estrato' 3 and surrounded by gated communities of 'estrato' 4 and 5, an interview was conducted with Jaime Aristizábal, a long-time resident who has lived there for 50 years and witnessed the neighborhood's transformation over time.

Left to right:

Ciudad Jardín
neighborhood, 1969.
Image taken from
Cartografías de Bogotá

Ciudad Jardín
neighborhood, 2014.
Image taken from
Mapas Bogotá

The neighborhood grew through informal urbanization processes. In the interview, Jaime recalls that during the 1970s, Ciudad Jardín Norte was surrounded only by fields, haciendas[3], and hills. As wealthier neighborhoods began to appear in the area, features like the Sunday market served as a point of connection. Residents from upper-middle-class communities would visit to buy fresher and more affordable products. Although the market eventually closed, people from nearby areas still come seeking the same experience.

Jaime refers to the arrival of gated communities in the 1990s as an "urban invasion." While these developments were legal, they integrated into the existing low-income infrastructure, placing pressure on public services and creating what he perceives as a form of uneven development. Despite this, he says he does not feel discriminated against by residents of the neighboring communities and even describes friendly interactions. While this is just one testimony, it suggests a degree of social integration across estratos.

He also comments on the growing presence of bars and clubs, associating them with a broader shift in land use caused by speculative investment and gentrification. This change is not only visible in commercial activity but also in new residential developments that follow more enclosed and exclusive models.

This case illustrates the complexities between informally developed neighborhoods and surrounding gated communities. While there are some tensions shaped by uneven development and pressures on shared infrastructure, there are also moments of connection and interaction that challenge the boundaries. This reveals not only the contrasts in urban development but also the potential for informal and formal sectors to influence one another.

Gated community (left) in the Ciudad Jardín neighborhood in Bogotá.
Image by © Author

3. Large rural estates or plantations that were a central feature of the social and economic landscape in colonial and post-colonial Latin America.

Conclusions

- Gated communities, despite of the socio-economic class, are often found in proximity to informally developed neighborhoods.

- There are economic networks that show an interdependence between informal employment / low-income jobs and the upper and middle-class gated communities, with a coexistence based on consumption.

- The residents of gated communities placed in peripheral city areas (usually low-income population) are subjected as well to a lack of access to facilities. Implying that the physical divisions in these zones result in more insecurity and a discontinuous urban environment rather than social fragmentation or class segregation.

- The physical space between gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods evidence an interrupted continuity of the city due to diverse types of barriers that complicate the circulation, walkability, and interaction between zones.

- Beyond the most apparent perceptions of division and fear, there are interactions that emerge because of the proximity, revealing how relationships can come up from the influence that both typologies can have on one another.

2.4 Going forward

The importance of informality

Recognizing the self-built city implies addressing the importance of the people that shaped it, contributing to the economic, social, and urban development of Bogotá. With their hands they built their houses; self-supplied services such as public lighting and access to drinking water; constructed parks, schools, churches, and public facilities; and preserved places of symbolic importance to the history of their neighborhoods. With creativity they cultivated, beautified, and cared for their homes, exercising their right to inhabit the city, contributing to the Bogotá's history and heritage (Niño Murcia et al, 2023).

Strategies

The previous analysis showed that, although economic segregation does not always apply to the relationship between gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods (since the newest enclaves are not necessarily for the upper classes), they still create divisions and limit interaction between residents. At the same time, they generate spaces of indifference and insecurity outside their gates, contributing to higher crime rates and increased fear in the public environment.

Building on this analysis, the conclusion of the thesis will present a proposal for intervention. Based on the challenges and weaknesses identified in the first two chapters, the project will explore how the existing city can be adapted to encourage greater interaction and integration between gated enclaves and informal settlements. This includes rethinking how gates might be opened to a more connected urban life, and how buffer zones and mixed housing types can help activate the in-between spaces of this urban divide.

Chapter 3 will focus on collecting and analyzing case studies to identify non-site-specific strategies related to integration in open public spaces. It will look at which approaches have been used to connect informal settlements with the wider city, and examine broader urban transformations that offer useful insights (both in terms of successful practices and lessons on what to avoid).

Gated community in Bogotá.
Image by © Author

Precedents & lessons

The contrast between fences and informality represents a challenge in their integration. Socio-economic differences intensify as older neighborhoods that slowly consolidated into the city, or still are, must succumb to the rules of these newer typologies and are progressively swallowed into their presence, but not their dynamics. The problem becomes managing an integration that respects the preexistence without ignoring the changes happening around them.

Gated communities came as a turn in how urban life is experienced and modeled, separation is intensified by a continuous wall-lifting, but at the same time the use of greenery and open spaces (mostly private) is intensified, with buildings being surrounded by public parks and sports amenities, with an overall higher quality of its public spaces (in contrast with the non-planned parts of the city). An urban proposal for integration under this context must work on the permeability between the parts, evaluating the positive aspects of both and the ways in which they could complement each other.

As a base for the specific intervention proposal that will conclude the thesis, general strategies applicable to non-site-specific scenarios will be suggested. These will be modeled after diverse case studies from Europe and South America.

Methodology

The objective is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses to understand common patterns in their planning and results, in hope of giving light to the most suitable measures. The case studies will be classified into three categories (Urban integration, Informality, and Urban districts), the more significant will be analyzed in-depth, while others recapitualated for more specific features. For concluding, they will be compared in a matrix as a way of extracting leads of useful actions to adapt and implement in the chosen design area in Bogotá's scenario.

3.1 Case-Study Analysis

The three categories for the case studies vary in scale and focus of their integration objectives:

- Targeted Urban Interventions: For punctual projects that focus on targeted urban transformations. Enhancing public space, mobility, or social interaction through localized interventions.
- District Urban Transformations: For large-scale, district-wide projects that reshape entire neighborhoods. These cases involve long-term planning efforts that integrate mixed-use development, sustainable infrastructure, and cohesion strategies.
- Informality Integration Strategies: For policies and programs that address informal settlements and social inclusion. These initiatives focus on infrastructure improvements, participatory planning, and bringing informal neighborhoods into the urban fabric.

Criteria for selecting the case studies

The case studies included in the first category are selected based on their explicit focus on urban integration and social cohesion. Each example aims to bridge spatial, social, or economic divides within the city, hopefully trying to favor the inclusion of marginalized or historically excluded populations. For the second category, the selected cases go beyond punctual interventions, bigger initiatives analyzed with the objective of seeing behind the projects and reflect how neighborhoods might evolve organically rather than strictly following designer-imposed models. Lastly, the third category contains programs focused on improving informal settlements, aiming to enhance living conditions while minimizing the risk of gentrification often associated with urban renewal projects.

* In-depth analysis

Targeted Urban Interventions:
Superkilen* / **Afrikaanderplein*** / Plaza de la Hoja

District Urban Transformations:
Bijlmermeer* / Ciudadela Colsubsidio / Vauban District

Informality Integration Strategies:
Northeast PUI / Favela-Bairro Program (Phase II)

Superkilen

Copenhagen, Denmark
Desing: Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), SUPERFLEX, Topotek 1
2012

Nørrebro, a district located northwest of Copenhagen's city center, is one of Denmark's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Historically, since the 19th century the area attracted waves of workers due to its industrial development. In the latter half of the 20th century, significant immigration occurred from countries such as Pakistan, Morocco, and regions in the Middle East (Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2021). However, the district has also faced considerable challenges, frequently portrayed as a troubled area. Parts of Nørrebro have appeared on Denmark's Parallel Societies List, previously known as the "Ghetto List," highlighting issues related to social conflict and perceived danger.

Against this backdrop of rising social division caused by discrimination and radicalization (Sheikholharam, 2022), Copenhagen's city council partnered with the Danish foundation Realdania in 2004 to initiate an urban renewal project. The aim was to foster social integration and revitalize the Nørrebro area. Central to this initiative were three key projects designed to enhance community cohesion: the development of two parks, Superkilen (Super wedge) and Mimersparken, along with the creation of a community center (Stanfield & Riemsdijk, 2019). In 2005, an international design competition selected a collaborative team composed of Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), the Danish artist collective SUPERFLEX, and the Berlin-based landscape architecture firm Topotek 1 to design Superkilen.

Superkilen site plan.
Image by © Topotek 1, BIG, Superflex
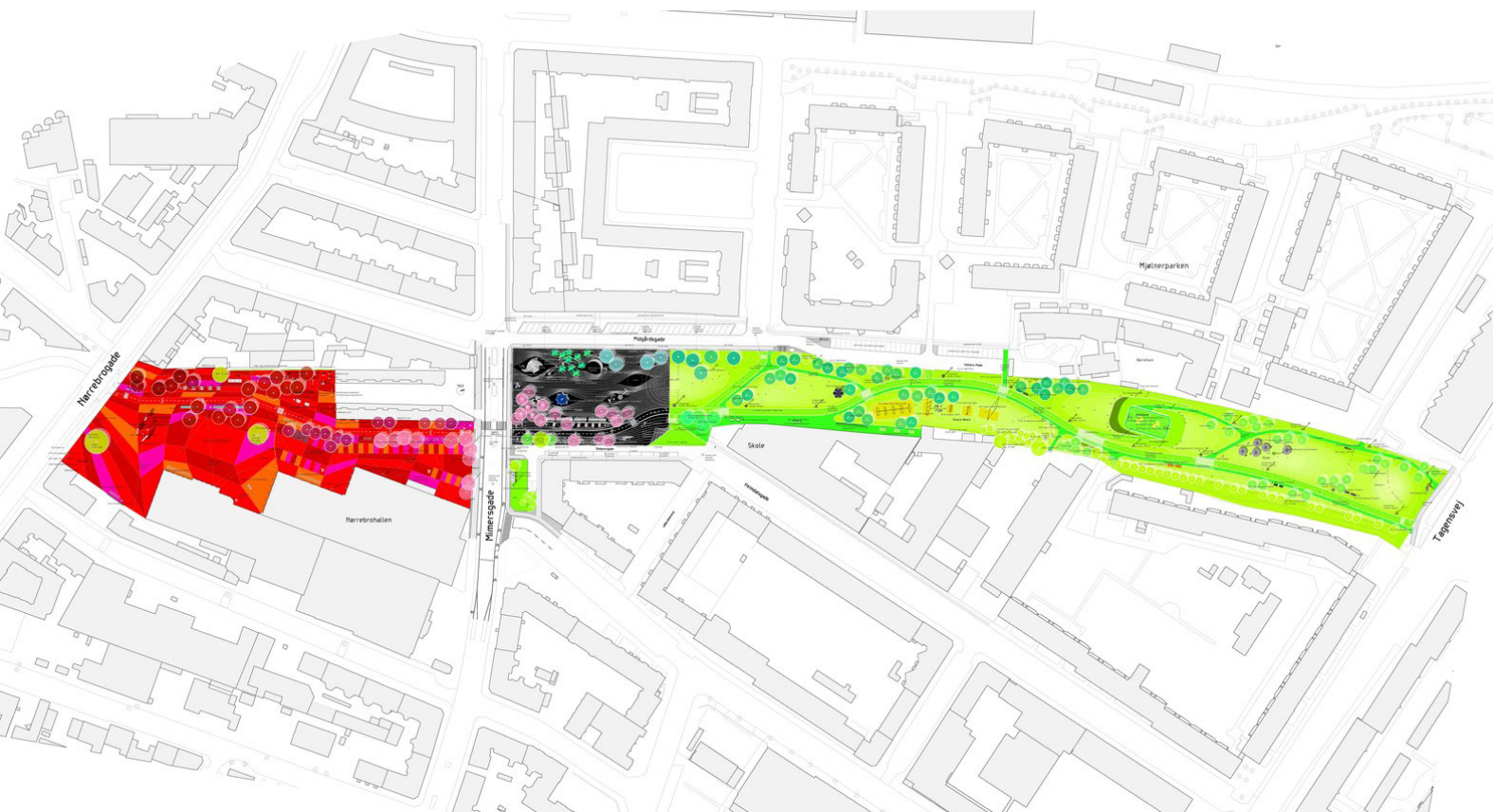
The black square.
Image by © Iwan Baan

Process & Solutions

Public participation, integration, and multiculturalism were fundamental principles guiding the Superkilen project's development. The park is divided into three distinct zones, each designed to serve a specific purpose. The "red zone," named for its vibrant pavement color, is dedicated to sports and cultural activities, complementing the nearby sports hall. The main area, known as the "black square," features white curved lines on black pavement and serves as the project's social heart, encouraging community interaction and integration. The third area, a more traditional linear green park covered with grass, is designed as a natural space for gatherings (BIG, 2012).

In an interview with Michelle Leigh Voss (2016), Bjarke Ingels emphasized that Superkilen aimed to foster local ownership, specifically providing a sense of belonging for the culturally diverse community of Nørrebro. To accomplish this, SUPERFLEX engaged residents in selecting urban elements such as benches, trash bins, trees, and playground equipment reminiscent of those they had seen in their home countries or travels. These objects were either precisely replicated or directly imported and placed throughout the park. Ingels described these items as "historical artifacts displayed in a museum" (Voss, 2018). Additionally, SUPERFLEX developed an app that provides detailed information about each of the 108 culturally diverse elements from sixty different countries, emphasizing community input and involvement as central to the project.

Results, Impacts, and Shortcomings

Superkilen, inaugurated in 2012, has received both widespread acclaim and strong criticism. Its innovative approach to park design, its striking aesthetics, the connections it proposes, its infrastructure, and, mostly, its curated objects have led for it to be prominently featured in the media, earning it the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Elements such as Palestinian soil, a Moroccan fountain, benches a multitude of countries, and many more items became central to the intervention, and simultaneously a major point of critique.

Artist Brett Bloom (2013) criticized the project's approach to public participation, pointing out that while some residents wanted more green spaces, large paved areas were still prioritized. Participation was also limited to selecting objects rather than influencing key design decisions, reducing democratic engagement (Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2021).

The way spaces were designed and programmed did not always align with the community's daily activities, potentially excluding certain local groups. At the same time, there is an overrepresentation of western objects despite accounting for only 19,6% of the neighborhood's population. Objects meant to encourage interaction did not always succeed (Daly, 2019), suggesting they serve more as a tool for public space consumption rather than a reflection of local identities. Other issues point to poor material choices, such as the red pavement, which becomes slippery when wet and is difficult to maintain, as well as concerns about the ecological impact of excessive paving (Bloom, 2013).

Despite these criticisms, some positive aspects of the project have been pointed out. It created a "third space" that blurs the line between public and private, offering local residents a place to gather. It also provoked discussions on cultural hybridity, identity, and the reinterpretation of symbols (Sheikholharam, 2022). Additionally, some elements successfully encouraged interaction, such as the Japanese octopus slide, which attracts children and favors conversation between parents, and the Thai boxing ring, which attracted people of different ages and backgrounds. However, other features, like sewer covers and other utilitarian objects, or items of religious significance, were perceived as insensitive cultural representations (Sheikholharam, 2022; Daly, 2019).
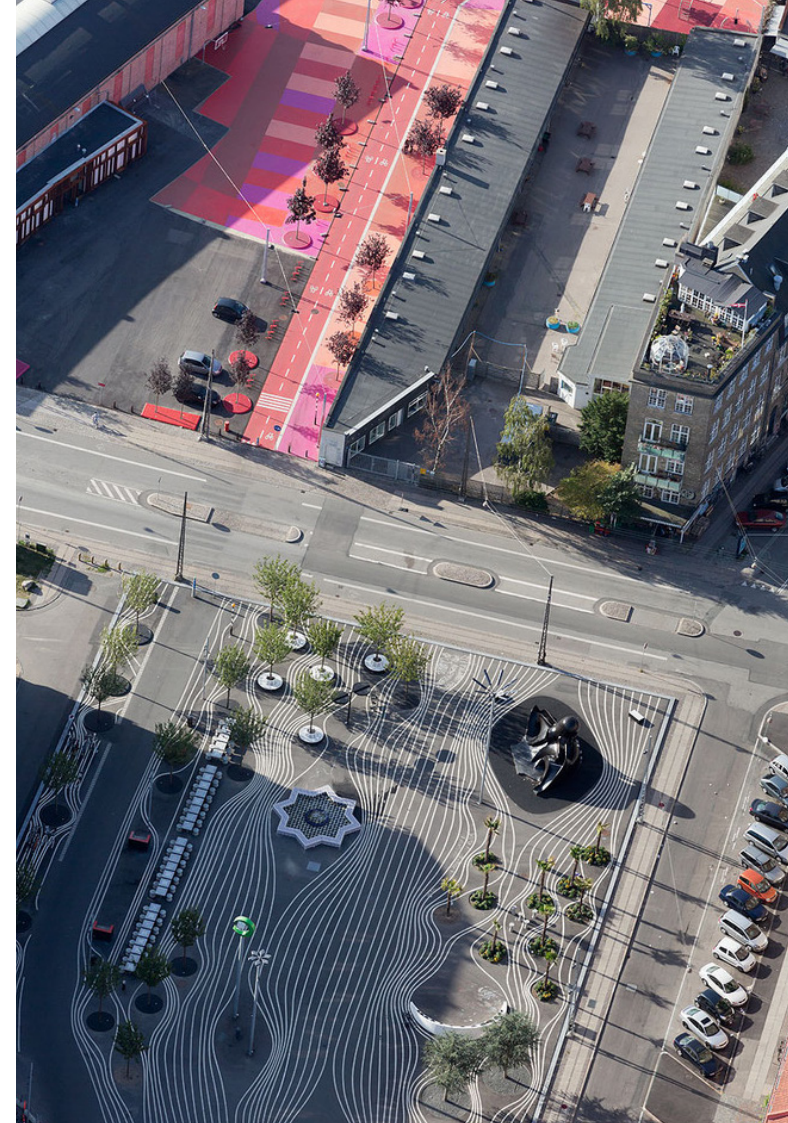
Superkilen has become a landmark in Copenhagen, attracting both locals and tourists. However, while it has undeniably left a visual and cultural imprint on the city, its actual success in achieving urban and social integration is limited.

Strengths

- **Cultural representation:** Symbols from 60+ nationalities included.
- **Participatory concept:** Residents helped select cultural objects.
- **Urban regeneration:** Transformed public space.
- **Visually striking aesthetic:** Bold, colorful, unique urban design.
- **Social interaction:** Try to encourage cross-cultural engagement.

Weaknesses

- **Restricted participation:** Community input was largely symbolic.
- **Superficial representation:** Diversity shown without deeper context.
- **Limited practicality:** Design questions usability and sustainability.
- **Static design:** Fixed symbols reduce flexibility and engagement.
- **Gentrification concerns:** Rising value risks resident displacement.
- **Questionable impact:** Fails to address deeper inequalities.
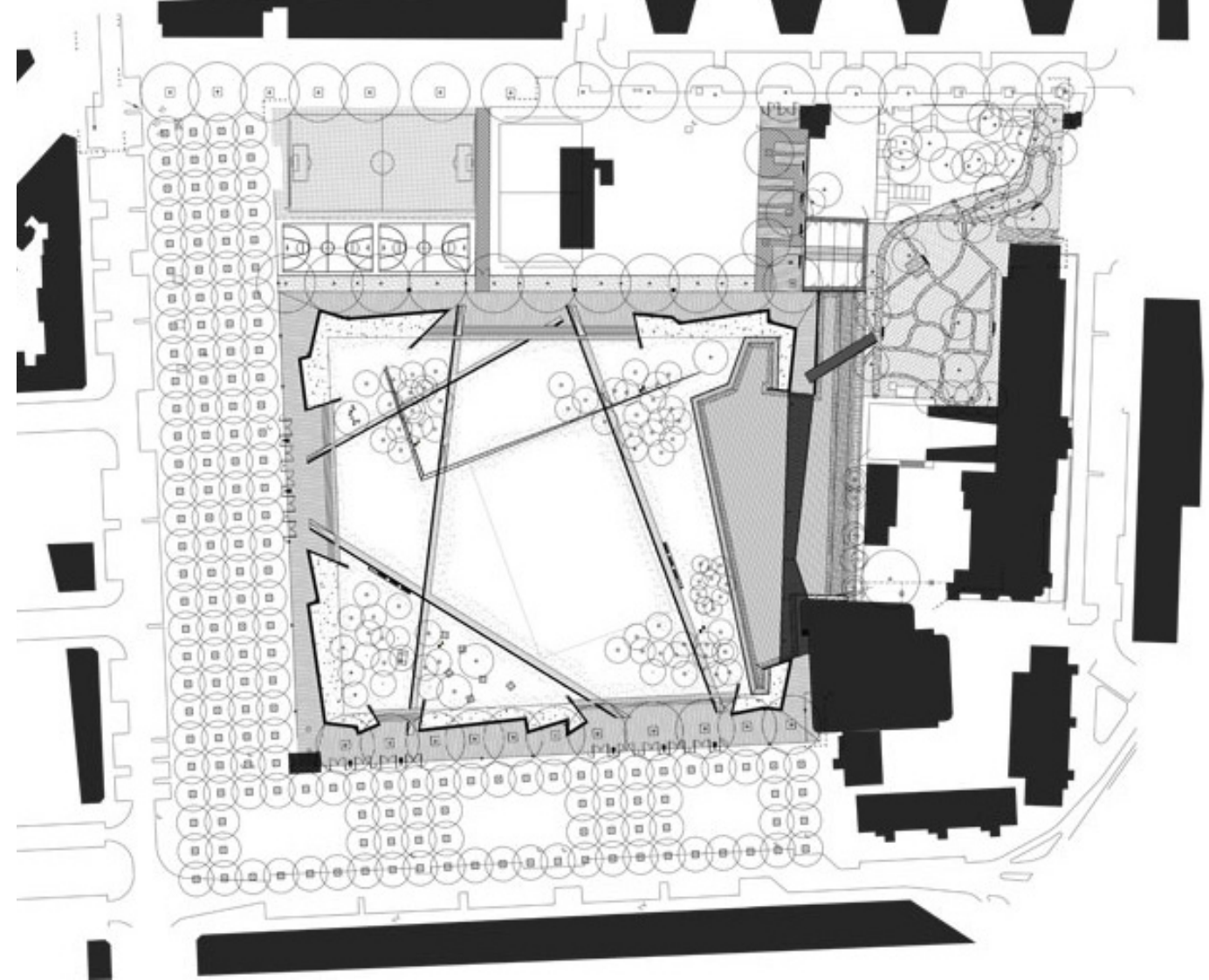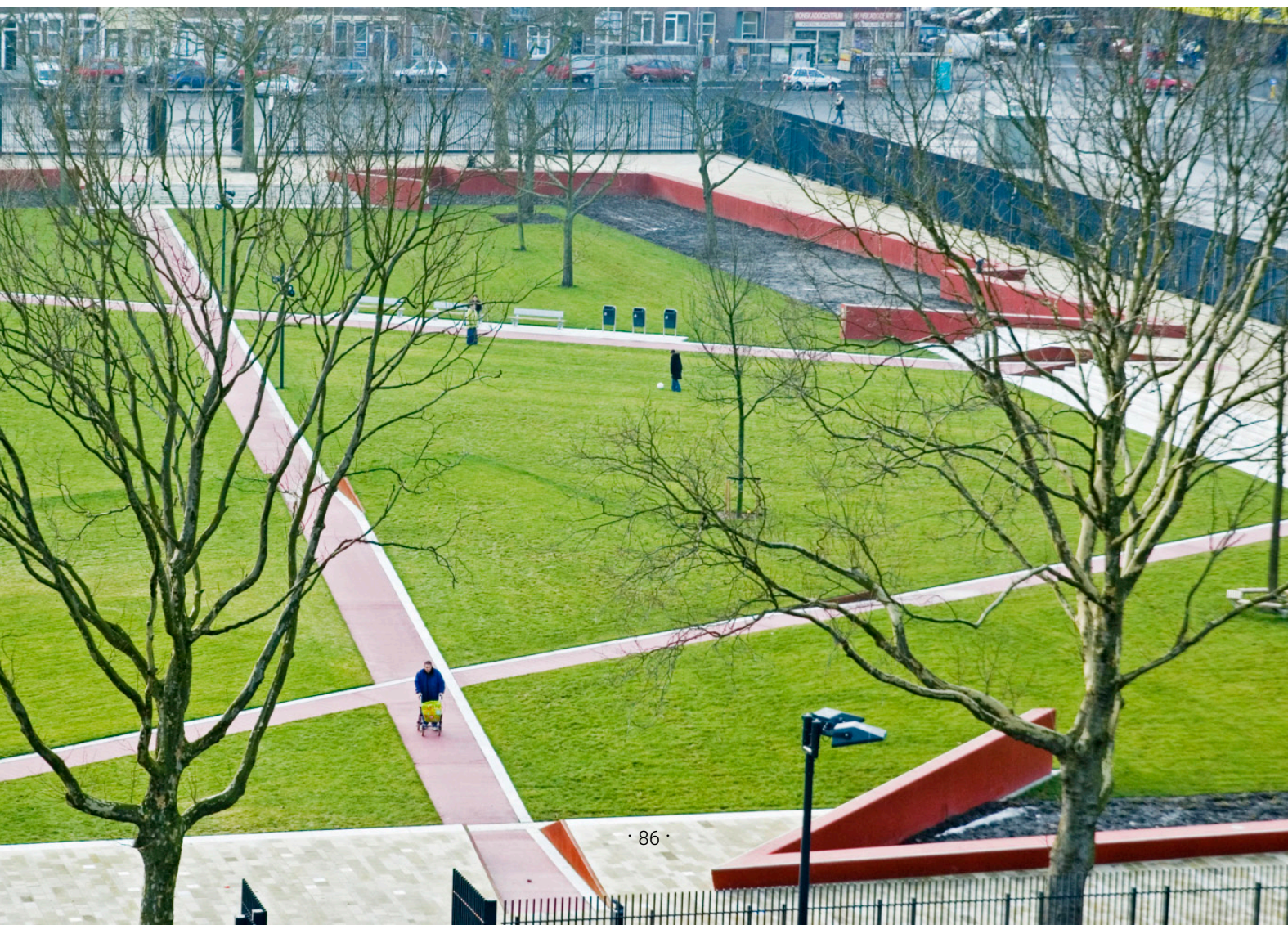
Afrikaanderplein

Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Desing: OKRA
2005

Afrikaanderwijk, located in Feijenoord in southern Rotterdam, is known for its diverse community and history of immigration. Historically, the area faced economic challenges and social segregation, reflecting broader issues found in many multicultural urban neighborhoods (Wood, 2015). With increasing diversity and social division, combined with broader urban concerns such as sustainability, climate adaptation, and inclusivity, Afrikaanderplein, a centrally located public square, experienced conflicting uses that resulted in fragmentation and tension among different community groups. Consequently, the space became poorly managed and disorganized, prompting its redevelopment between 2002 and 2006 (Bagwell et al., 2012).

During these four years, extensive dialogue took place involving various stakeholders, including local authorities, commissioned designers, construction teams, and over twenty different community and interest groups (Council of Europe, 2016). OKRA, a landscape architecture studio from Utrecht, was appointed to redesign the area. Their goal was to create a flexible, multifunctional space accessible and welcoming to residents of all ages, ethnicities, and genders, addressing the diverse needs and uses identified during the consultation process (Stuiver et al., 2022; Franz et al., 2022).

Afrikaanderplein. Image by © Ben ter Mull

Afrikaanderplein Plan. Image by © Ben ter Mull

Process & Solutions

Inclusivity and interdisciplinarity were central themes guiding the Afrikaanderplein redevelopment, achieved through collaboration among urban planners, landscape architects, and social researchers. To effectively address community needs, the project adopted a participatory approach that actively involved local residents, around 20 diverse user and interest groups, the borough of Feijenoord, local businesses, and government departments. All community members and organizations were encouraged to join in managing the square and organizing events, fostering a collective sense of ownership and responsibility (Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2021).

Due to this extensive consultation process, the design accommodates a variety of uses proposed by residents, allowing flexible programming and minimizing potential conflicts over space usage. Central to the design is an open green area intersected by diagonal paths, enclosed by a specially designed fence to address safety concerns. This fence opens daily on one side for approximately thirty meters. Surrounding the central area is an outer surface with natural stone edges, seating areas, and trees. Inside this zone, smaller dedicated spaces were created for specific community-requested activities, including a weekly market, sports center, playground, and poultry farm. Additionally, a calm zone, separated by a significant water feature crossed by a single bridge, includes botanical gardens and a mosque (LANDEZINE, 2010).

**Results, Impacts, and Shortcomings**

The park and its impact have been studied and generally praised, viewed mostly as a successful project. It received the Dutch Outdoor Space Architecture Award (OAP) for 2005-2006 (divisare, 2008) and various other recognitions. Unlike Superkilen, Afrikaanderplein integrated cultural diversity directly into its design and management rather than symbolically representing cultures visually. This practical approach to cultural inclusion was found to be more appealing to the local groups involved in the planning process (Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2021).

The park's design is particularly appreciated for accommodating a wide range of activities. It successfully balances permanently programmed spaces, like the market, playgrounds, and religious areas, with a flexible and open central green space. However, some dissatisfaction remains, mainly due to the difficulty in reaching complete agreement among different community groups. Certain groups felt their specific needs were not fully considered or addressed (Buijs, 1998).
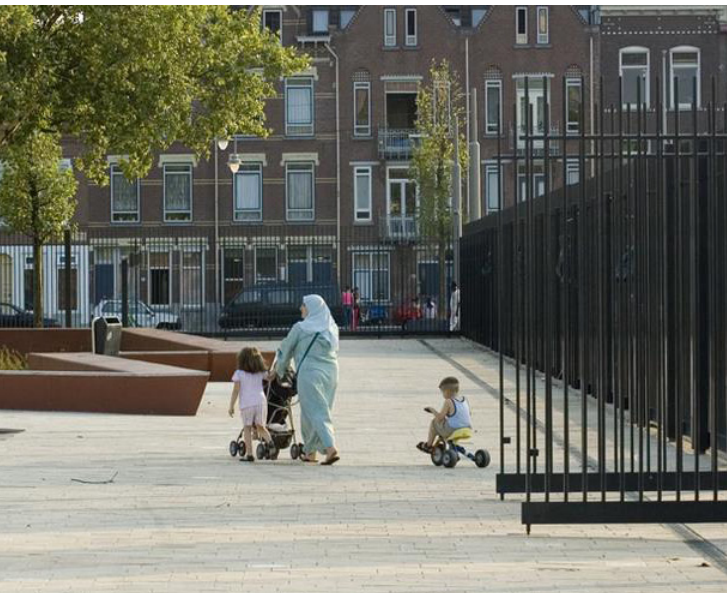
Criticism has been directed toward the subtle gentrification aspects of the project and related local interventions. Afrikaanderplein transformed from a spontaneous, loosely organized space into clearly defined zones, neglecting its historically flexible and organic nature (Vervloesem & Dehaene, 2011). A notable example of this is the fence surrounding the central green space, restricting access and reducing the area's previously open and adaptable character.

The park's success is not only attributed to its physical design but also its ongoing management and sustained community engagement. Efforts have been made to strengthen the local economy, helping residents become more self-reliant and less dependent on welfare or informal economic activities. Additionally, local social organizations have supported market vendors and nearby businesses, contributing positively to the neighborhood's overall stability (Wood, 2015). Local policies continue to address social and economic inequalities, focusing particularly on improving access to healthcare and housing for residents (Bagwell et al., 2012). As with many urban renewal projects, gentrification remains a concern. An increasing number of middle-class Dutch residents have moved into the area, creating tension and discomfort among some original community members (Doucet & Koenders, 2018). In the other hand, others view this demographic shift positively, seeing it as a way to attract economic activity and improve overall living conditions (Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2021).

Today, Afrikaanderwijk in Feijenoord continues to be a central location for various projects aimed at diverse housing options, education, sports facilities, and public spaces (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2024). Continuous public participation and active community involvement in shaping the neighborhood's future seem to be key strategies for addressing inequalities and promoting greater social integration.

Strengths

- Public participation: Community shaped design.
- Multifunctional and flexible: Supports diverse daily uses.
- Cultural inclusion and cohesion: Promotes cross-cultural interaction.
- Balance of activity and tranquility: Combines lively and peaceful areas.

Weaknesses

- Symbolic barriers: Fencing creates exclusion perception.
- Gentrification concerns: Upgrades linked to rising rents.
- Economic pressures: Regulations threaten market sustainability.
- Top-down urbanism: Imposed design could limit authenticity.

Plaza de la Hoja

Bogotá, Colombia
Desing: MGP Arquitectura y Urbanismo
2015

In response to the history of violence and forced displacement in Colombia, the national government (2010-2018) launched the Free Housing Program (PVG for its initials in Spanish) to support low-income families and victims of the armed conflict (Ministry of Housing, City and Territory, 2014). The program aimed to provide 100,000 priority interest housing units* across the country.

As part of this initiative, and as a flagship project of Bogotá's city government at the time, the Plaza de la Hoja residential project would be developed in the Puente Aranda district. Unlike most social housing projects that are usually built on the outskirts of cities, this one was built on publicly owned land in a well-established area close to the city center. The project challenged the typical practice of pushing low-income housing to the urban edges and aimed to counter the city's socio-economic division by residential "estratos".

Plaza de la Hoja. Image by © MGP Arquitectura y Urbanismo

Ground floor plan of Plaza de la Hoja. Image by © MGP Arquitectura y Urbanismo

Key Actions

By means of an architectural competition, the firm MGP Arquitectura y Urbanismo was selected to design the project. It includes 457 apartments and houses around 1,800 people who were displaced by conflict (Mendoza, 2020).

The apartments were designed with flexible layouts so residents could adapt their homes to their specific needs. Vertical and horizontal circulation areas were organized around courtyards, terraces, and shared spaces to encourage social interaction. The ground floor was planned as an open space without fixed barriers between public and private areas. It included shops and community facilities meant not only to support the new residents but also to connect the project with the surrounding neighborhood and the adjacent square Plaza de la Hoja (Sainea, 2017).

Common areas. Image by © MGP Arquitectura y Urbanismo

· 90 ·

· 91 ·

Results & Takeaways

During the development of the project, some changes were made, mainly to the ground floor. For example, parking spaces were added in areas originally meant for pedestrians, ground-floor housing units were included, and the number of commercial spaces was reduced, with some of them repurposed as community facilities (Bedoya-Ruiz et al., 2022). A year after the apartments were handed over, many commercial areas remained unfinished and not ready for use. Other shared spaces, like rooftop terraces, were also incomplete. Tensions during the planning and construction phases, along with pressure from the local government to finish the project quickly, led to technical work and the management of community spaces being left unfinished (Mendoza, 2020). Residents also fenced off the central accessible area, changing the original design intention.

Despite the project's central location, new residents still faced social exclusion. Even before construction began, some neighboring communities opposed the project due to fear and distrust of the incoming population (Mendoza, 2020). Living near the city center did not automatically mean better access to services, issues like overcrowded schools, a lack of green spaces, limited job opportunities, and the absence of institutions to support social and work integration continued to affect residents (Bedoya-Ruiz et al., 2022).

Though the project stands out for being located in a central and established part of the city, unlike most social housing, many of the tools and plans meant to support its success were not properly implemented, leaving key issues unresolved.

Strengths

- Open ground floor: Public access and mixed uses.
- Use of public land: Central location, no private dependency.
- Management plan: Coordinated public institutional support.
- Broad regulation: Strong legal framework enabled execution.

Weaknesses

- Rushed construction: Quality and comfort compromised.
- Lack of social infrastructure: Key social services added too late.
- Weak community participation: Residents informed, but not empowered.
- Design criticism: Architecture seen as cold and rigid.
- Unfinished spaces: Shared areas remain incomplete and unused.

Bijlmermeer Urban Renewal

Amsterdam, The Netherlands
1993-onwards

After World War II, Amsterdam was growing fast, and ideas like the Garden City and Modernism were spreading across Europe following the housing needs. In the 1960s, the city government decided to try a new kind of housing development in the southeast, just outside the city center. Based on ideas like strict zoning, organization, and a focus on modern city planning, a neighborhood with high-rise buildings arranged in a hexagonal layout was built. These buildings were surrounded by large green areas, kept separate from industrial zones, and connected to the city with elevated roads and a metro line.

The housing was originally intended for middle-class Dutch families, but its distance from the city and its cold, impersonal design led to high vacancy rates. After the Suriname independency, many apartments were filled by migrants from former Dutch colonies in the Americas, especially people of Afro-Surinamese background (Abdou, 2017).

There was little maintenance, few shops or services, and a growing stigma against the new residents. The design didn't help either: ground-floor storage areas and narrow corridors made it hard to feel safe, and the wide green spaces made surveillance difficult. Discussions about improving the area had started earlier, but it wasn't until 1992, after an El Al cargo plane crashed into two housing units, that serious urban renewal began. This included demolishing several high-rises and rebuilding with lower, denser housing and more services to better meet the needs of the community (Heijboer, 2009; Abdou, 2017).

Map of the Bijlmermeer expansion. Image by © Collection of the Amsterdam City Archives: maps of parts of the city

Bijlmermeer in the 1970's. Image by © BijlmerMuseum

Process & Solutions

A report published by the Bijlmermeer Renovation Planning Office (Projectbureau Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer, 2014) outlines the strategies used to carry out the neighborhood's urban renewal. By 2010, around 7,000 of the original 13,500 housing units had been demolished. The remaining buildings were renovated and kept as part of the area's original layout. Renovation efforts included upgrading the flats and improving basic infrastructure. Ground-floor storage spaces and long corridors were removed and replaced with new housing units and commercial spaces. Some of the surrounding green areas were turned into private gardens, shifting maintenance responsibilities from the community to individual residents.

The demolition process did lead to displacement, but the renewal plans included steps to reduce its impact. Displaced residents were promised access to affordable housing within the same area, and about two-thirds chose to remain. The report also highlights community involvement. Surveys were carried out to gather residents' opinions, showing that around half supported the renewal plan.

Another key goal was to improve access to services. The renewal introduced schools, health centers, and cultural facilities, as well as initiatives to support creative industries. Infrastructure was also redesigned; elevated roads were lowered to better connect vehicles and pedestrians. Public space was reduced from 80% to 40% to make room for private gardens and easier access. Markets and shops were added throughout the neighborhood to bring activity and convenience closer to residents.

Results, Impacts, and Shortcomings

The introduction of new strategies aimed at creating a more livable, mixed-use, and connected neighborhood brought visible changes to the Bijlmermeer district. The area began to look and feel safer, with noticeable improvements in public spaces. Political efforts were also backed by better waste collection and management services, contributing to a cleaner and more organized appearance (Projectbureau Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer, 2014).

Despite these physical improvements, the renewal process exposed significant flaws. Although the municipality claimed to involve residents through surveys and consultations, final decisions were largely made from the top down. Migrant communities and their descendants, who made up a large part of the local population, were left out of meaningful participation in the planning stages (Dukes, 2009; Abdou, 2017). This raised concerns about ongoing exclusion and tension within the community.

One of the key goals of the project was to support residents in improving their socioeconomic conditions. Yet this goal was only partially met. Even after the renewal, over 40% of children in the area continued to live in low-income households (Council of Europe & Economic Commission, 2013), despite added schools and support services. The way the renewal was carried out, within a framework of neoliberal urbanism, meant that many of the investments primarily benefited private developers and businesses rather than the local residents (Abdou, 2017). Local culture was often used for branding purposes, and the renewal process led to gentrification concerns (Berr, 2020).

Bijlmermeer in 2017.
Image by © Stijn
Brakkee

In conclusion, the Bijlmermeer renewal brought urban improvements but also serves as a reminder of the risks tied to exclusionary planning that overlook long-term social equity and community involvement.

Left to right:

Bijlmermeer in 1971.
Image by © Ger
Middelkoop

Bijlmermeer in 2012.
Image by © Marco Van
Middelkoop

Strengths

- Improved urban design: High-rises demolished, mixed-use functions.
- Social infrastructure: New health, educational and sports faciltiies built.
- Manageable public space: Safer, more contained outdoor areas.
- Rehousing strategy: Displaced residents rehoused within district.

Weaknesses

- Limited participation: Institutions led key decisions.
- Socioeconomic displacement: Vulnerable groups pushed out.
- Market-driven planning: Profit prioritized over equity.
- Gentrification pressure: Rising costs threaten affordability.

Ciudadela Colsubsidio

Bogotá, Colombia
Desing: Germán Samper and team
1983-2006 (onwards)

Located around the west border of Bogotá, between the main road Calle 80 and the Juan Amarillo wetland, Ciudadela (Citadel) Colsubsidio was developed in 1983 in response to a law that required for compensation funds to provide housing for their affiliates as contribution to the housing deficit. Colsubsidio commissioned the architect Germán Samper to design an urban solution for the 130-hectare site. Because of the far distance to the city center the project needed to offer services and integrate with the adjacent neighborhoods, and at the same time provide different housing solutions for families of distinct socioeconomic classes affiliated (Gamboa Bohorquez, 2014).

Ciudadela Colsubsidio. Image from © Germán Samper. www.germansamper.com/colsubsidio-vivienda-multifamiliar
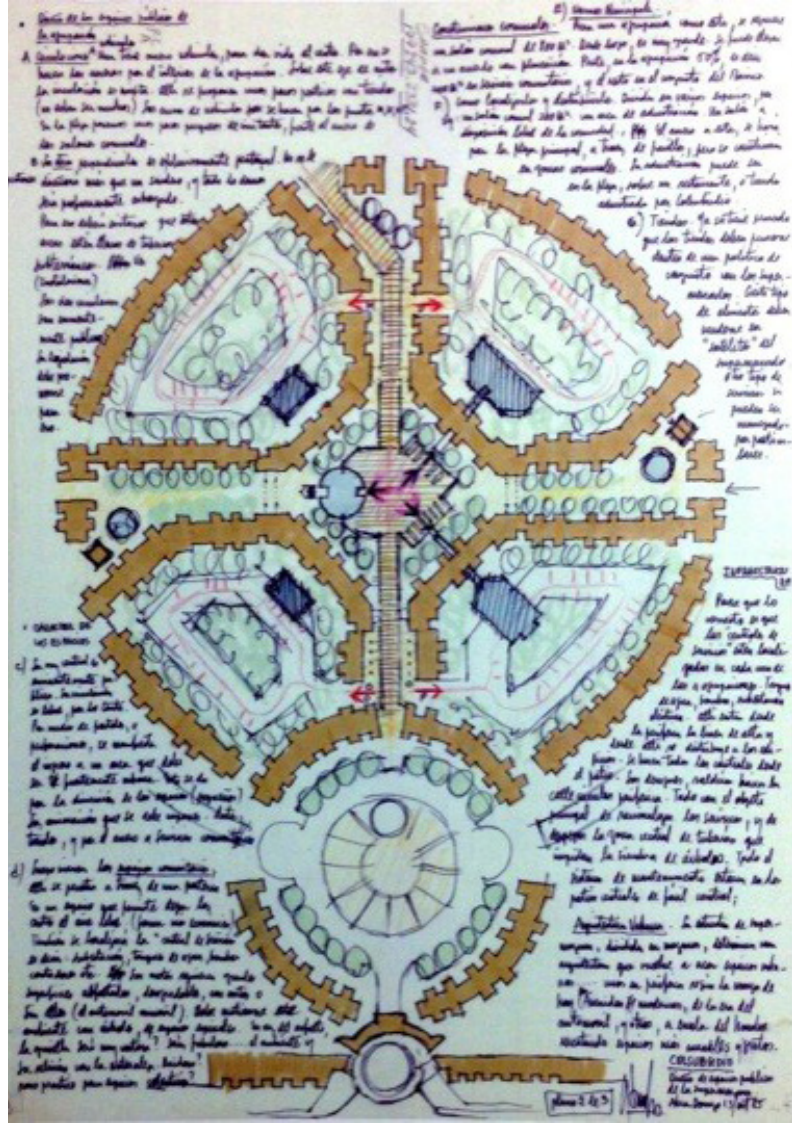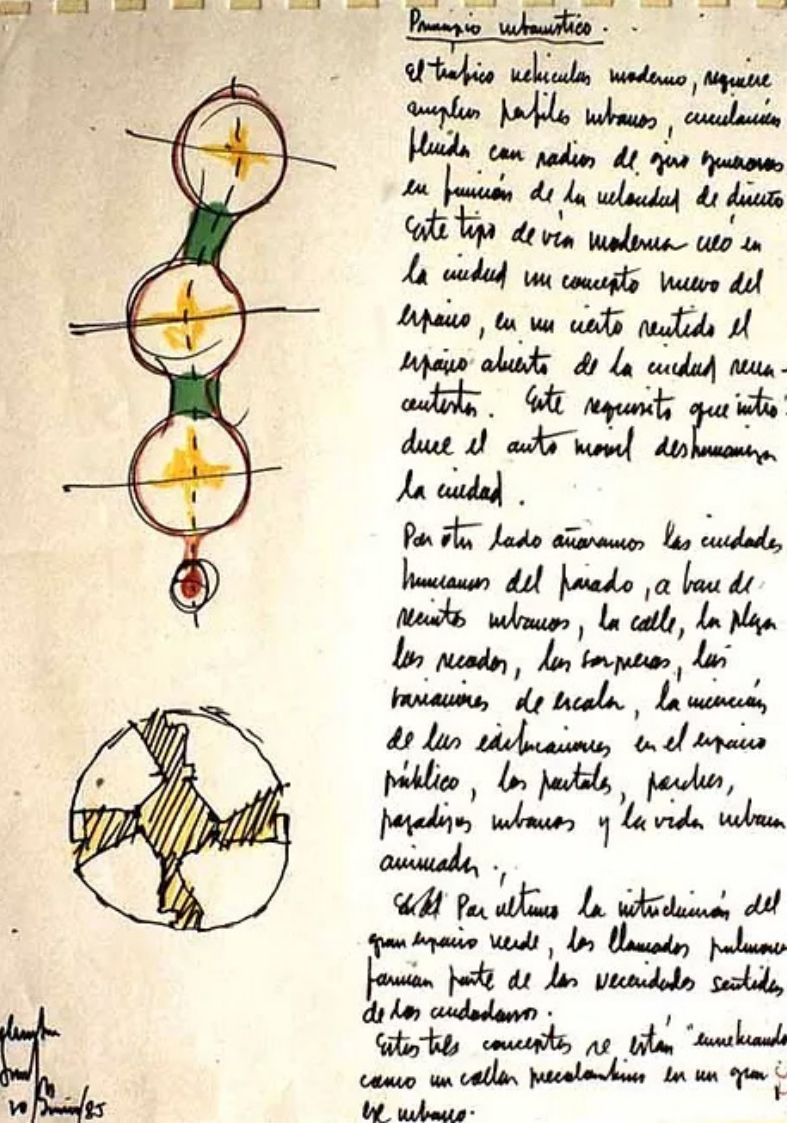
Key Actions

Completed almost two decades after, the project is structured around five circular "super-blocks" that divide the vehicular roads giving access to the inside of the blocks through central, pedestrian axes, these axes connect residential areas and public parks, ensuring continuity. The large circular "rotondas" as organizing nodes give shape to other irregular blocks and housing is design by different architects promoting architectural diversity (German Samper Arquitecto, 2015). Brick facades (responding to Bogotá's materials in the 1980's) and plazas inspired in European architecture define the character of the spaces; public spaces comprise 60% of the site, integrating plazas, green areas, and sport facilities until the edge of the wetland, as well as squares with local commerce in the center of some of the superblocks (Gamboa Bohorquez, 2014). The design connects to adjacent neighborhoods by two artery roads, trying to avoid rigid zoning, mixing 7 single-family blocks with houses of progressive development, and 15 multifamily blocks with 5 story buildings conforming gated communities (Téllez Vera, 2009), attempting to enable social diversity. Schools, a church, and a shopping center complete the urban fabric (Gamboa Bohorquez, 2014; German Samper Arquitecto, 2015).

Left to right:

Project scheme. Image by © Germán Samper

Project scheme. Image by © Germán Samper

Results & Takeaways

Mauricio Téllez Vera (2009) draws a line between the planned version of a project and how it's actually lived in, using Ciudadela Colsubsidio as an example. He criticizes how these kinds of developments are often shaped by the architect and the client (Colsubsidio in this case) rather than by the people who will live there. The aim is often to control how urban life works, overlooking its naturally spontaneous character.

Téllez Vera points out concerns about social division within the project, caused by differences between housing types (like progressive units and gated communities); commerce placed in the front yards of the single-family houses; the focus on security through enclosure; and limited freedom in using public spaces. These divisions may affect residents' ability to connect, feel represented, and build a shared identity—though some people might see these features as positive.
Still, community ties form from things like the school or the church, as well as the interplay of formal and informal networks.

The project offers a valuable case for understanding how urban form, property and development must consider not only spatial organization but also cultural dynamics, participation, and the evolving needs of its inhabitants.

Strengths

- Pedestrian planning: Walkability prioritized in layout.
- Diverse housing: Mix of typologies included.
- Phased development: Gradual build enabled adaptability.

Weaknesses

- Security by enclosure: Gated logic reinforces separation.
- Market shift: Commercial goals overtook social aims.
- Limited participation: Residents excluded from design process.

Vauban District

Freiburg, Germany
1992- onwards

The Vauban district in Freiburg was formerly a military base used by the French army until 1991, then it went back to the government and was rapidly purchased by the City of Freiburg for developing a residential district. Before any formal development students, squatters and activists began picturing alternative plans for the space. A design competition was held and the project originally neglected community priorities, but as activist community groups such as the Vauban Forum took form the vision for the neighborhood turned into a mixed-use and largely car-free district (Delleske, 2018).

District map. Image by © Erich Lutz

Key Actions

The development included a mix of refurbished military barracks and new buildings, with about 80% of the buildings being self-constructed by Baugruppen using the co-housing concept (collective effort where multiple families or individuals contribute financially to acquire and construct a property), promoting affordability, community control, and architectural diversity (Sartor, 2022).

Other strategies consist on prioritizing pedestrian and cyclist circulation; proximity-based planning assuring access to services; public transport integration; use of sustainable energy and construction; discourage car use with few parking spots and car-free zones; and a focus on community participation, with various groups consisting of local citizens, political representatives and city administration to ensure work between the different stakeholders (UN-HABITAT, 2015).

Vauban. Image by © SCRITTI

Results & Takeaways

The project showed several positive results, especially in terms of sustainability. It featured low energy use and emissions, green infrastructure, and a car-free design. Strong community involvement also helped create a sense of ownership and connection among residents. The co-housing model helped lower construction costs, while the city keeping ownership of the land protected the neighborhood from real estate speculation. It also showed promising results in terms of collaboration between public and private sectors (UN-HABITAT, 2015).

On the downside, even with reduced costs, the housing remained out of reach for many low-income households, at the same time the 25% target for social housing was not reached, with only 10% being delivered (UN-HABITAT, 2015); this results in a homogenous population, limiting social diversity. Additionally, while public involvement was key to the project's success, placing too much responsibility on residents raised ethical concerns, and this reliability on the community may make it harder to apply this model in areas with greater inequality and lower levels of community organization (Sartor, 2022).

Strengths

- Co-housing model: Shared living reduced costs.
- Land ownership: City retained property control.
- Community participation: Residents shaped planning process.
- Car-free concept: Pedestrian safety and sustainability prioritized.

Weaknesses

- Lack of diversity: Population remained relatively homogenous.
- Limited affordability: Prices excluded lower-income families.
- High participation demands: Not universally practical or inclusive.

Northeast PUI

Medellín, Colombia
2004-2011

The Integral Urban Projects (PUI) are an intervention strategy based on the concept of social urbanism having three main components: physical, social and institutional. The Comunas (territorial division) 1 and 2 in the northeast zone were selected due to their low-quality-of-life indicators and high homicide rate, historically being the area with highest population growth and informal housing development (Restrepo Alvarez, 2024).

Centered around the communities served by the Metrocable (elevated cable cars), the project addressed infrastructure development, community participation, and institutional coordination for the construction of public parks, a library park, educational centers, and new housing, complementing the Metrocable by enhancing public transport access and green areas. The residents were involved in the project design by "talleres de imaginarios" (imagination workshops), and committees were formed to oversee design and implementation, fostering transparency and ownership ensuring the visibility and realization of the community's needs (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2006).

Mirador, PUI Nororiental. Image by © Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (EDU)

The project is limited by its limited resources, inconsistent institutional support, complex geography, and legal issues. However, is a model that would be later replicated in other zones of Medellín and a reference for inclusive urban development in vulnerable areas.

Favela-Bairro Program (Phase II)

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
2000-2008

The program emerged in Rio de Janeiro in the 1990's as a response to the exclusion of the favelas from urban planning. Historically, government strategies focused on eradicating informal settlements and relocating it residents, the program contemplated an inclusive urbanization model that integrated favelas into the formal city. Strategies focused on environmental stabilization, road construction, formalizing land tenure, improving housing access, and establishing local support offices, improving the access to public services such as water, sewage, lighting, and other facilities, while trying to include the communities in the decisions and implementation (Andreatta, 2005).

In a report done by the Interamerican Development Bank (that also was part of the program's financing) the condition of the infrastructure done in the second phase of the program (FB2) was evaluated to revise the sustainability of these interventions. Initially the project had positive outcomes with an improvement in the general quality of life, however they showed deterioration over time, with sewer systems, drainage, lighting, and paving in similar conditions to non-intervened areas, mainly due to a lack of maintenance, rapid population growth, security challenges and overcapacity issues (Libertun de Duren & Osorio Rivas, 2020).

Those issues highlight the need for better materials that need less maintenance, strategies for complicated geographical areas, and social strategies to tackle security and overcrowding issues.

Favela da Maré, Rio de Janeiro. Image by © Marco Derksen, via Flickr

3.2 Strategies

Comparative matrix

Negative — Positive (color legend)

Category	Case-Study	Public Space Activation	Public Participation	Social Inclusion	Usability and Maintenance	Gentrification Risk	Adaptability
Targeted Urban Interventions	Superkilen	Visually bold and unique	Limited to object selection	Symbolic rather than functional	Poor material choices in some areas	Moderate - Due to landmark status	Low – Highly site-specific
	Afrikaanderplein	Diverse uses (Market, prayer, play)	20+ user and interest groups	Ongoing local support programs (self-driven)	Fence limits its openness	Moderate - Rising rents	High – Practical community approach
	Plaza de la Hoja	Unfinished public spaces and activities	Informative only, not participatory	Exclusion despite centrality	Many shared and commerce spaces unfinished	Low - Social housing on public land	Medium – Depends on strong institutional coordination
District Urban Transformations	Bijlmermeer Renewal	Denser layout and manageable public spaces	Mostly top-down	Some displacement, benefits unequally shared	Better maintenance (Public to private)	High – private sector benefits	Medium - Large-scale and politically complex
	Ciudadela Colsubsidio	Pedestrian centered layout and circulation	Limited to the institutional client	Mixed housing types (different parts of the area)	Phased development allowed adaptation	Moderate - Market-driven logic with time	Medium - Spatially adaptable, but culturally specific
	Vauban District	Green, car-free design	Strong co-housing model	Limited by affordability	Resilient infrastructure	Low – Public land ownership	Low – Requires strong civic culture and land policy
Informality Integration Strategies	Northeast PUI	New parks, library, and public spaces	Imagination workshops and committees	Better mobility and access to the city	Limited institutional support	Low – Focus on vulnerable zones	High – Applicable to vulnerable zones
	Favela-Bairro Program	Better roads, paving and general infrastructure	Community involvement in design	Limited by maintenance decline	Degraded over the years	Low – Focus on vulnerable zones	High – Applicable to vulnerable zones

Comparative matrix for the case studies. By The Author

Insights

- Across all cases, community and public participation are key factors when trying to achieve social cohesion and long-term sustainability of the interventions.

- Designing flexible and multifunctional spaces that align with the everyday needs of the diverse users prove better functioning, while rigid and overly aestheticized spaces fall short in promoting real interaction.

- Community-driven and inclusive projects show higher potential for replication in contrast with large-scale interventions, although the political will and institutional support during and after the development are crucial for ensuring the projects efficiency and longevity.

- Gentrification risk and the balance between spatial improvement and social equity remain central tensions. Interventions must be supported by long-term policies, inclusive planning frameworks, and mechanisms that protect vulnerable populations.

Non-site-specific strategies

- Create shared in-between spaces (e.g., a plazas, linear parks, or community corridors).
- Install informal seating zones and rest stops in transitional spaces.
- Organize cultural exchange events (sports, dance, food festivals).
- Use workshops, mobile libraries, and other inviting activities in the shared spaces.
- Improve lighting, signage, and street furniture in connection points to increase perceived safety and comfort.
- Include alternative housing options in new developments near the boundary to create natural interaction.
- Encourage mixed-use ground floors where people meet.
- Prioritize pedestrian circulation over car mobility.
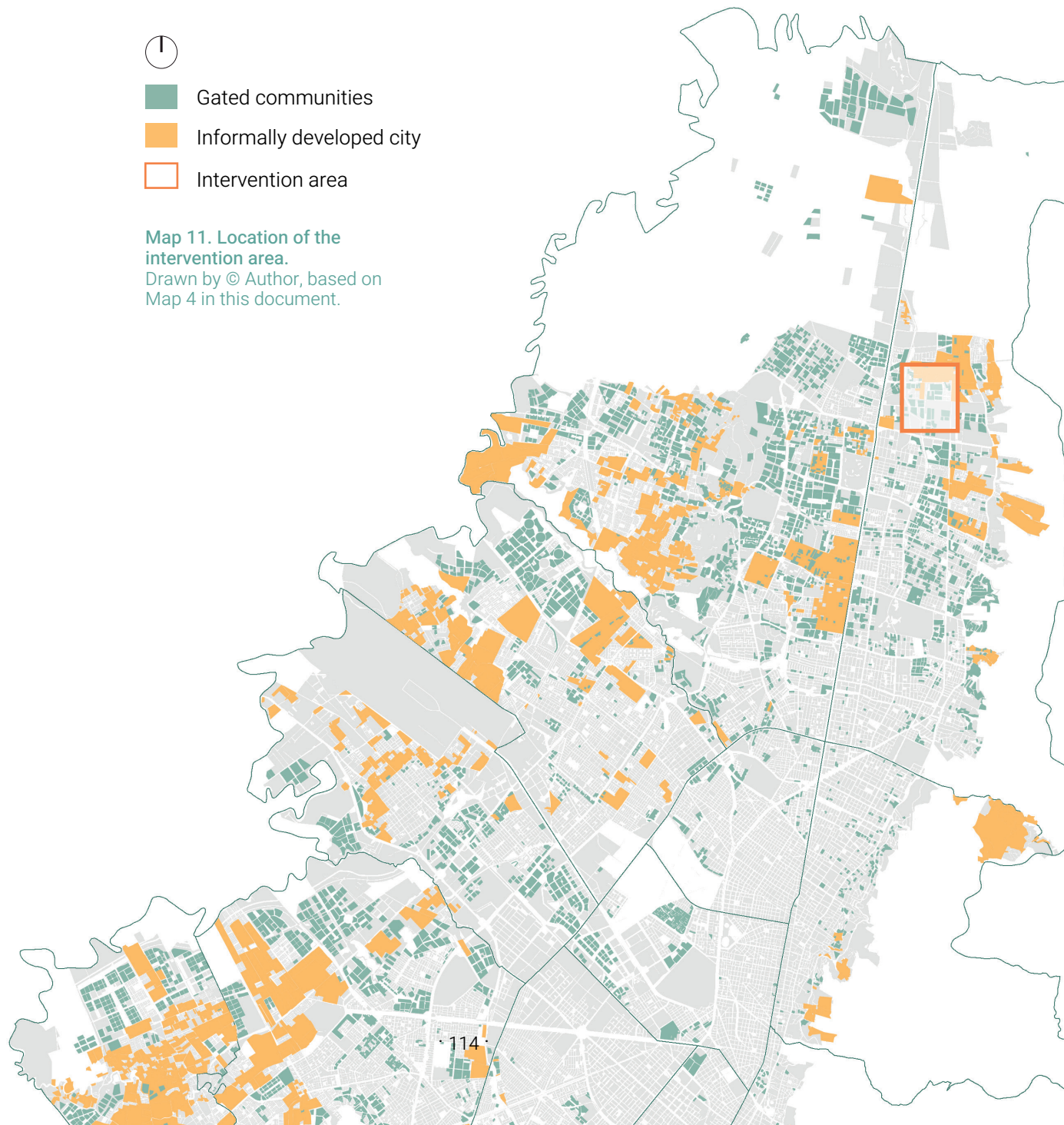
Study area

4.1 Site selection

As previously stated, Bogotá is broadly composed of places where both urban typologies meet. Selecting the specific study area for the intervention proposal implies considering the historical development, specificities of its built environment, social composition, and current developments. The site needs to be representative of the issue that represents the division inside the city, so the selection followed a series of criteria:

- It should be a place where both gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods share the same space.
- The residents should be of different socio-economic groups, which translate into sharper physical borders and a deeper division.
- There should be room for new constructions and open areas for public space. Additionally, the site should be under development treatment in its normative, leaving place to work with new plans and developments in the surroundings.

Gated communities

Informally developed city

Intervention area

Map 11. Location of the intervention area.
Drawn by © Author, based on Map 4 in this document.
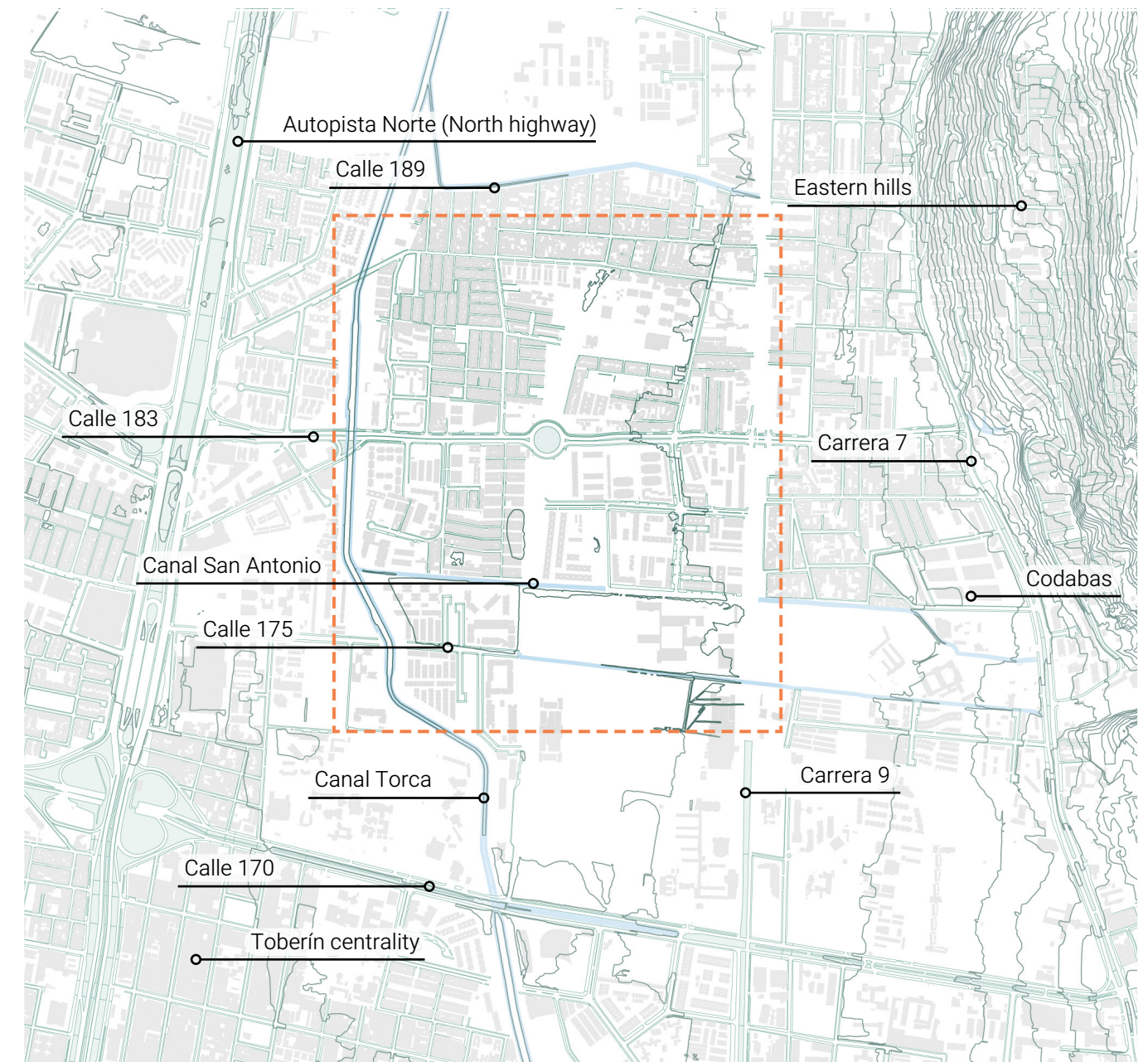
Map 12. Broader context of the study area.
Drawn by © Author

Intervention area ---- Constructions █ Canals ──

0m   200m   1000m
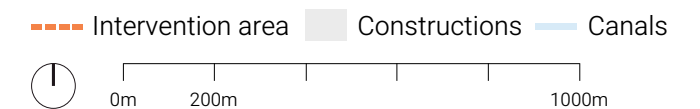
The area inside the city

The intervention area is located on the northern edge of the city, within the UPL Toberín in the Usaquén locality. Nearby, to the west, is the Autopista Norte (one of the main routes out of the city to the north) and to the east, the Carrera 7, another major exit. Key nearby roads include Calle 170, a main east-west corridor in northern Bogotá. The area is also close to the Toberín centrality, which has a mix of commercial and industrial uses, and the Codabas market on Carrera 7, a food and supply shopping center.

The area is bordered by the Torca canal to the west, Carrera 9 to the east, Calle 189 and the Canaima canal to the north, and Calle 175 along with the El Redil canal to the south. Apart from the contrast between gated communities and informally built neighborhoods, the presence of large private schools, universities, and vacant private lots as enclosed areas add to the sense of physical separation in the sector.

4.2 Site analysis

Gated communities
Informally developed city
Intervention area

For this period, the area was mostly composed of large parcels of land, haciendas and agriculture fields. The Carrera 9 was already a main axis in the area because of the railway that goes along, it was the only train connection with the north municipalities.

Along the 1970's informal developments started to appear between the Canaima canal and the Calle 183. Schools such as the Santa María (below Calle 187) and La Salle (above Calle 170) emerged in lots owned by religious institutions.

As many informal neighborhoods continued their growth, during the 1980's and 1990's the first gated communities in the area were built, usually composed of low-height towers and houses, but big parcels, occupying large portions of land.

This pattern continued in the first years of the 2000's, as the informally developed city started to consolidate, new private enclaves continued to emerge. The Torca canal was built, creating a stronger boundary to the west of the area.

Into the mid 2010's, new enclaves started to appear with higher towers, occupying more land, and with more facilities, inside neighborhoods composed only by that typology, such as Alameda. Informal development slowed down in the area, but in certain zones continued.

For 2024 those new enclaves continued their growth, and the Calle 183 was enlarged. In 2021, for the large plot belonging to the La Salle school, the urban plan "Ciudad La Salle" was adopted, with a planned large volume of gated communities. It started its construction in 2022 (See 4.3).

1969   1981   1998   2004   2014   2024

Historical aerial photos of the study area.
Images taken from Cartografías de Bogotá and Google Earth

116   117

Map 13. Road hierarchy of the study area.
Drawn by © Author. Source: Secretaría Distrital de Movilidad.

Main road
Intermediate road
Local road
Planned roads
Pedestrian road
Planned pedestrian road

Intervention area

Streets:

Av. Santa Barbara (Planned)

Calle 188

Carrera 16

Calle 183

Carrera 15 (Planned)

Carrera 9 (Planned)

Calle 170

0m   200m   1000m

· 118 ·

Map 14. Current and planned public transport 2025.
Drawn by © Author. Source: Datos Abiertos Transmilenio, POT Bogotá

Transmilenio line (BTR)
BTR station
Bus routes
Bus stop
Planned metro line
Planned regional tram
Intervention area

Mobility and access

As stated before, the main road near the area is the Calle 170, connecting the hills with the west, however the most important east-west axis passing through the intervention area is the Calle 183, explaining its recent enlargement, as it connects with new developments in the northwest of Bogotá after the Autopista Norte.

Map 13 evidence the lack of connection between those two main horizontal axes, with no north-south roads linking them between the Carrera 7 and the Autopista Norte, even leaving a gap in public transport throughout all that area (map 14). At the same time, there is a strong contrast between the zone above Calle 183 (informally developed) and the one above Calle 170. In the first there are intermediate roads following commercial axes such as Calle 188 and Carrera 16, and more presence of public transport; while in the latter there are only local roads, hinting a car dependency in that neighborhood.

The clearest connection gap in the area is the Carrera 9, that cuts after passing the Calle 170 and becomes discontinuous and of local scale. It is currently being expanded until the Calle 193 to drain the traffic impact in the Carrera 7 and the Autopista Norte. In the current POT, there is also a plan for a regional tram using its railway (in the present day its only used for tourism and the transportation of goods rather than mobility), that would link Bogotá with its northern metropolitan municipalities.

This project, along with the contemplated plans for a metro line along the Autopista Norte, the road network of the Ciudad La Salle urban plan, and the expansion of roads to connect to the developments in the further north should improve the traffic in the general context. However, regarding the specific intervention site, pedestrian paths will follow that vehicular development, as some large and currently unused open spaces will become the Carrera 15 (a new main road), and new roads will be built to connect the project of "Lagos de Torca", such as the Av. Santa Barbara along the Torca canal; prioritizing car mobility over human scale circulation.

· 119 ·

Map 15. Predominant ground floor use by construction in the study area.
Drawn by © Author. Source: UAECD 2024.

Legend:
- Housing
- Commerce
- Educational
- Storage / Industrial
- Offices
- Medical research
- Medical center
- Religious
- Soon to be demolished
- District school
- Private school
- Intervention area
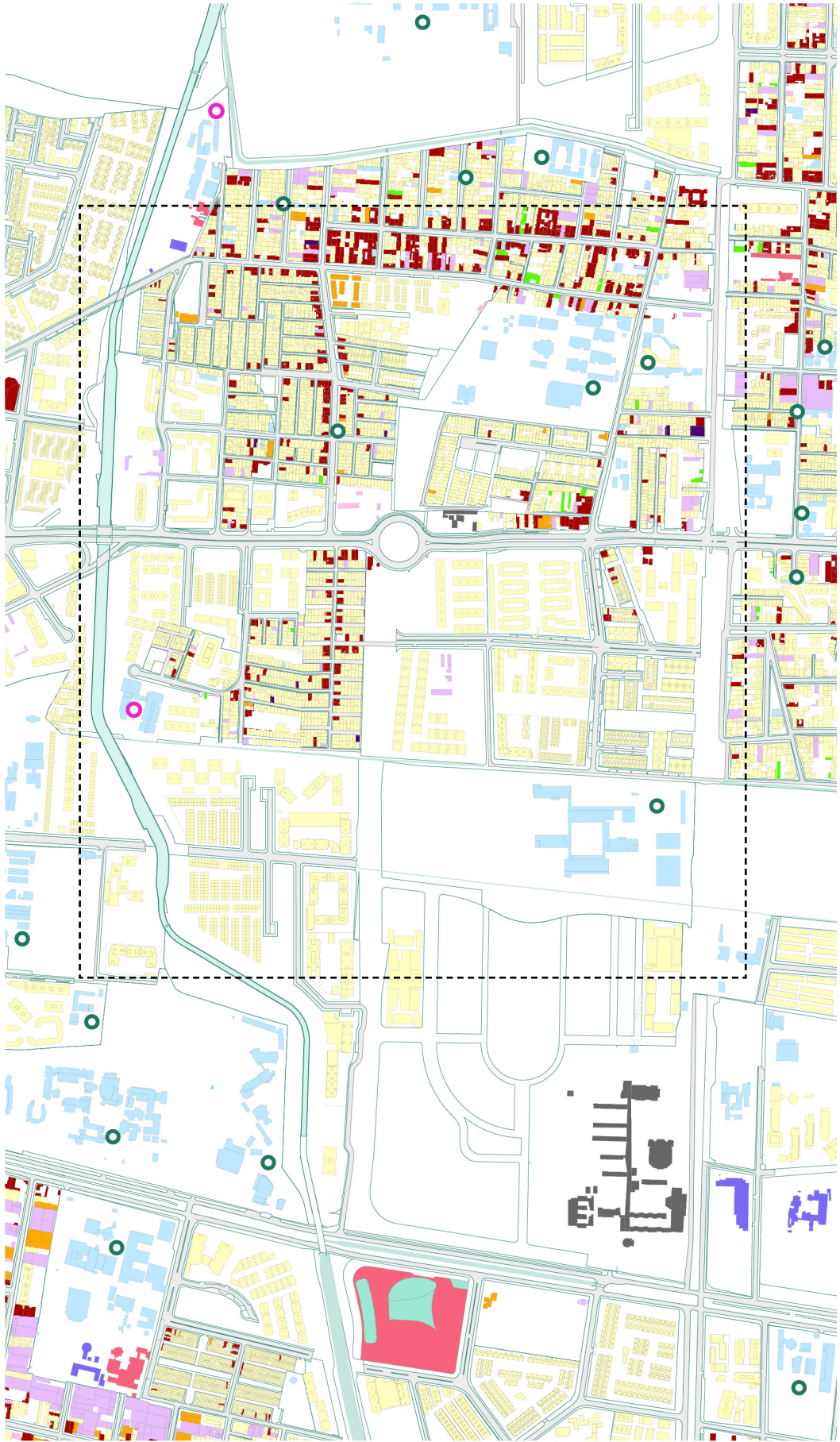
0m   200m   1000m

Predominant uses in the area

Commercial axis in informal neighborhood (Calle 188).
Image taken from Google Street View.

Category: Commerce

In many informally developed neighborhoods, people often turn the ground floor of their houses into commerce for economic profit. As the areas consolidate and main roads start to emerge, most buildings along those streets become of a predominantly commercial use on the ground floor.

Informally and formally developed single-houses.
Image taken from Google Street View.

Category: Housing

In areas developed informally or in the peripheries, formal housing developments for low-income families were usually built. These type of housing is not as flexible as the informal houses, people do place commerce in their homes, but not as often, and within the house original configuration.

Gated communities in Alameda neighborhood.
Image taken from Google Street View.

Category: Housing

Evidently this type of housing works very differently to the two types previously mentioned. There is no room for this typology to be transformed or adapted, meaning that often there is no mixture of uses, keeping exclusively a residential use.

Large scale private school (Colegio La Salle).
Image taken from Google Street View.

Category: Educational

Due to the development of this specific zone, being in the northern periphery where various religious institutions possessed large terrains, there is currently a large presence of private educational facilities that occupy substantial areas.

Map 16. Nolli plan of the study area.
Drawn by © Author.

- Private ground plan
- Open ground plan
- Park
- Canal
- Fences / Walls
- Intervention area

0m   200m   1000m
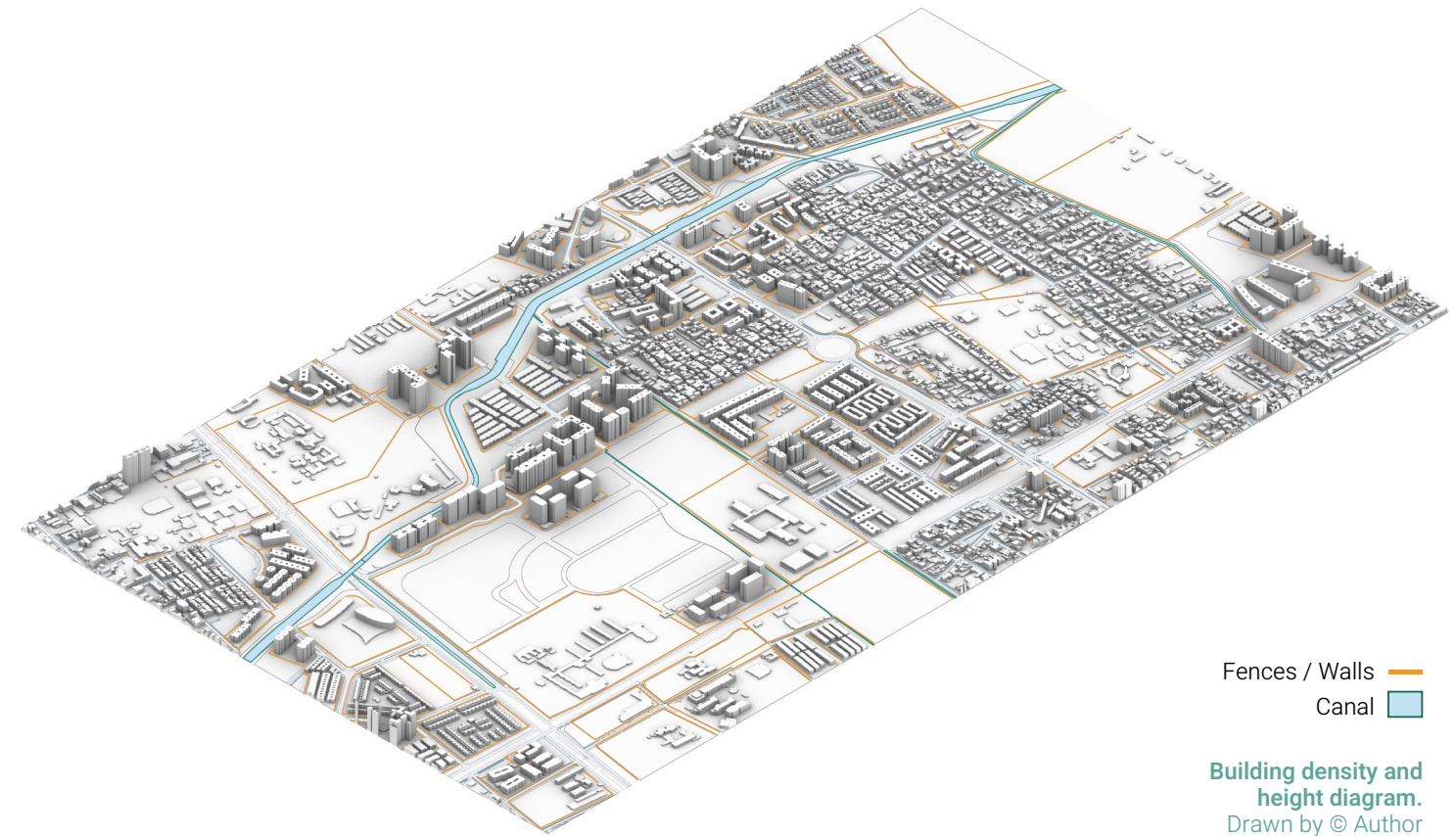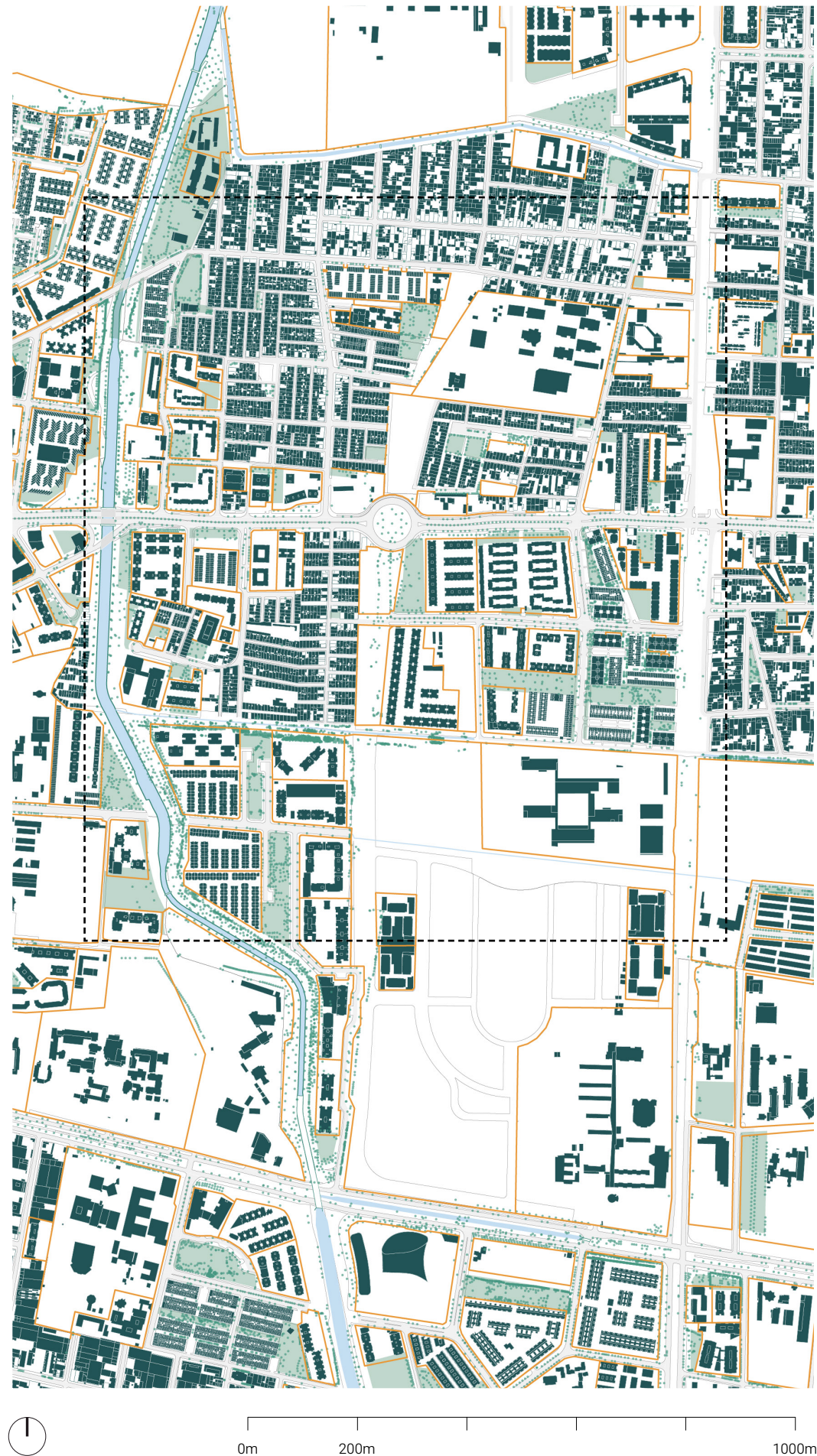
Fences / Walls
Canal

Building density and height diagram.
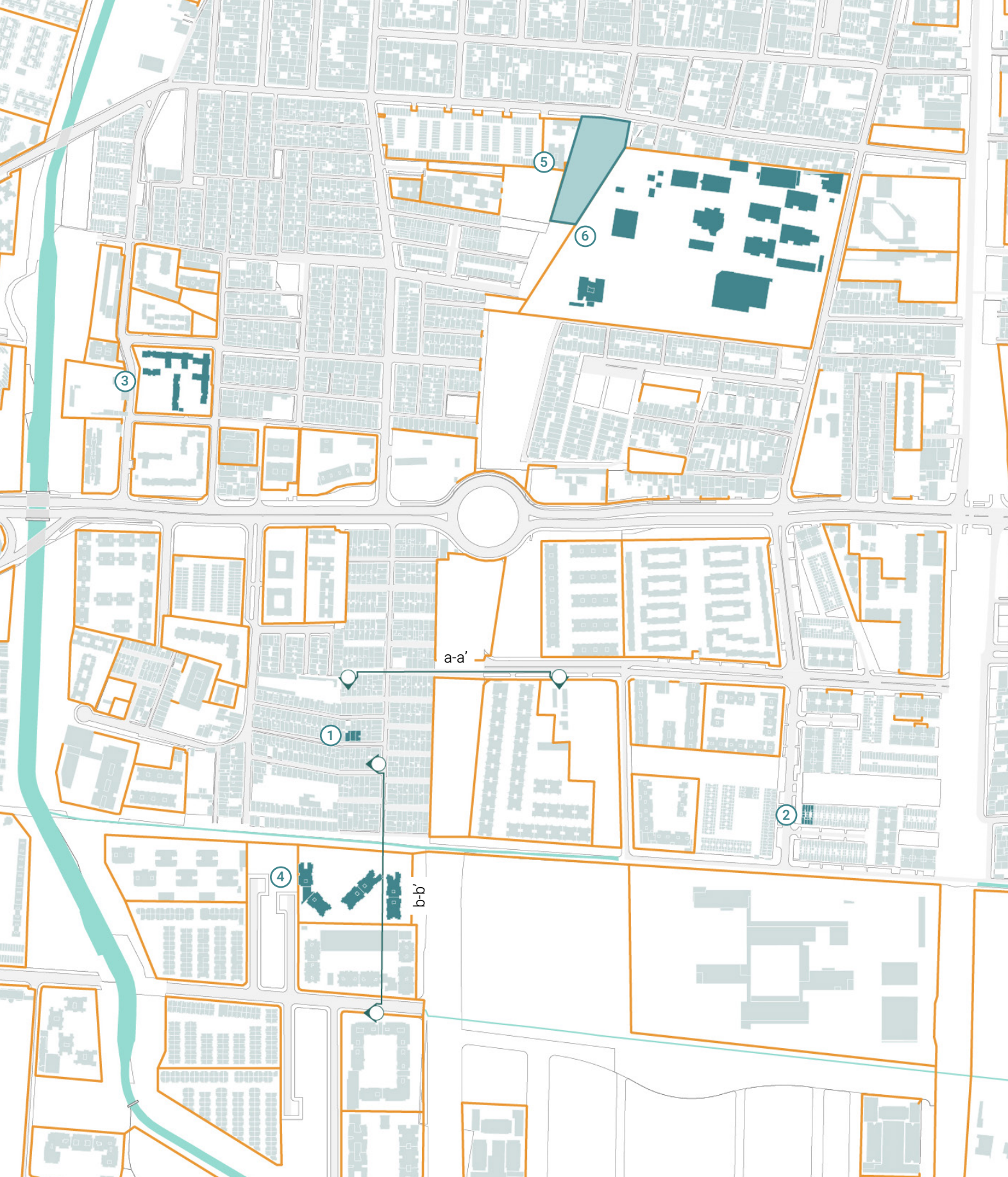Drawn by © Author

Urban morphology

Turning to the second chapter of the thesis, it was concluded that many of the divisions going on between gated communities and informally developed neighborhoods were physical. While some social connections and relationships were developed beyond the boundaries that emerged with the private enclaves, most of the general division in the city relied on the capacity of its residents to move freely, or lack thereof, and that itself is a social issue and not just barely a physical one.

The map 16 reveals the openness and permeability of the ground floor, and regarding the morphology of the study area, four things linked with the predominant use analysis are highlighted. The commercial axes in the informally developed neighborhoods such as the one in the Calle 188 are more open, since their ground floors are accessible, although the typology itself occupies the whole lot, it enables a more dynamic urban life and circulation.

On the other hand, typologies such as the gated communities and the private schools bring the opposite effect. In despite of the large open spaces inside the lots, due to a lower lot occupation, these places are surrounded by fences, walls, and other types of barriers, limiting the mobility and the social interactions that could be held in those empty areas. The difference of lot occupancy does not reflect on the density of the buildings, gated communities have increasingly become taller and larger in comparison to their early emergence in the zone, evidencing not only a contrast in plan, but a general highly contrasted picture.

Map 16 also shows a duality between the open spaces. Those are publicly accessible marked as parks, and the white ones, large portions of empty land completely fenced and isolated from their surroundings. These areas are key moving on with the project, representing an opportunity for open spaces that actually connect, rather than just being another typology of a divided city.

Intervention area.
Image taken from
Google Earth.

Urban typologies

To expand on the morphology analysis and understand in detail the spatial dynamics, the intervention area will be analyzed on a closer scale. The spaces and specific architecture are part of what defines the place and how people live in it, analyzing them will reveal how they shape and are themselves shaped by how the city is experienced.

A series of axonometric drawings of some of the site's architectural typologies will help to do a comparative reading of their form, plot, enclosure, and public-private relationships. They are selected not for their singularity, but for how they are representative of the area's logics, repetitions, and divisions.

The selected typologies are:

1) Self-built single-family house
2) Formally-built single-family house
3) Early gated community
4) Recent gated community
5) Open lot used as service stations or parking
6) Private large-scale school

Additionally, two sections located the intersection between gated communities and the informally developed areas will show the physical barriers that configure those places in the intervention area, not looking only at built boundaries, but also at those empty lots and natural borders that contribute to the significant contrasts of the site.

a-a'

b-b'

◇ Sections   ▪ Analyzed typologies   ▬ Fences / Walls

0m   200m   600m

Map 17. Intervention area with the typologies and sections. Drawn by © Author.

Self-built single-family house.
Drawn by © Author
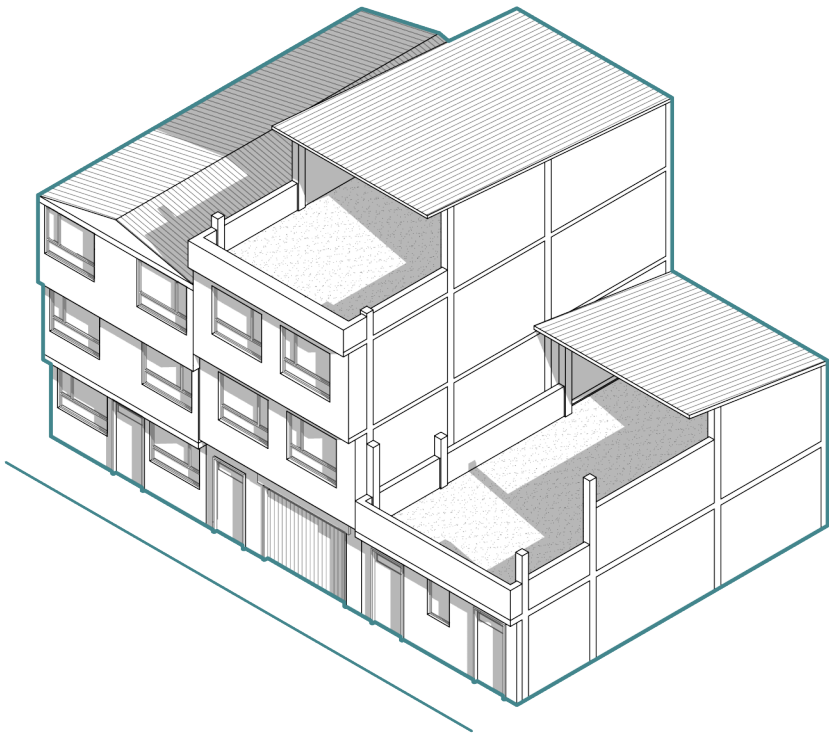
The most common typology around the neighborhoods that were developed informally. Houses built progressively, typically in lots of 12m x 6m. For their character they are the most easily adaptable and customizable for their resident's needs.

Use	Mixed-use / Residential
Scale	Low / Mid rise (1 - 6 floors)
Ground floor access	Open in commercial use
Plot occupation	Compact with street level access
Flexibility	Flexible

Calle 181 and Carrera 16.
Image taken from Google Street View.

②
Formally-built single-family house.
Drawn by © Author
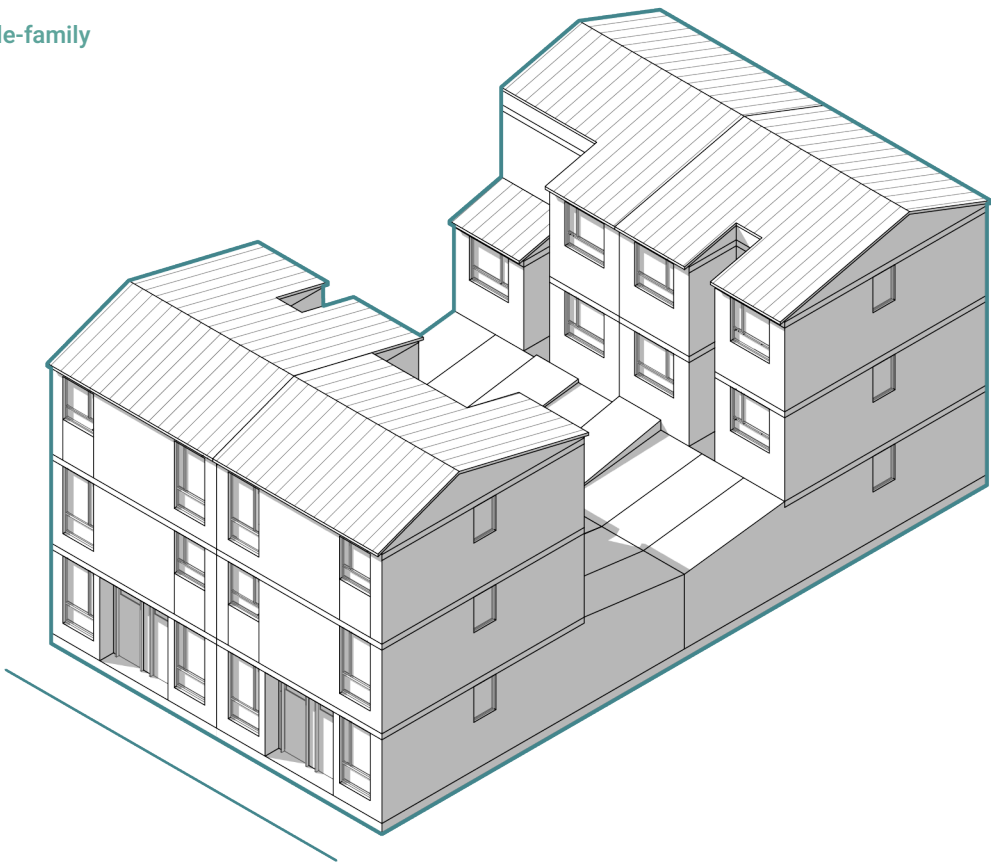
Mostly appeared in the early development of the neighborhood. They are houses built in a row following the same design in response to housing shortage, still, leaving room for progressive growth finished by the residents. Sometimes people place commerce of other services in these, but the spaces are less adaptable than those in the completely self-built houses.

Use	Mostly residential / Mixed-use
Scale	Low rise (2 - 3 floors)
Ground floor access	Open in commercial use
Plot occupation	Compact with street level access
Flexibility	Limited flexibility

Calle 180 and Carrera 10a.
Image taken from Google Street View.

0m   2m   10m

Early gated community.
Drawn by © Author
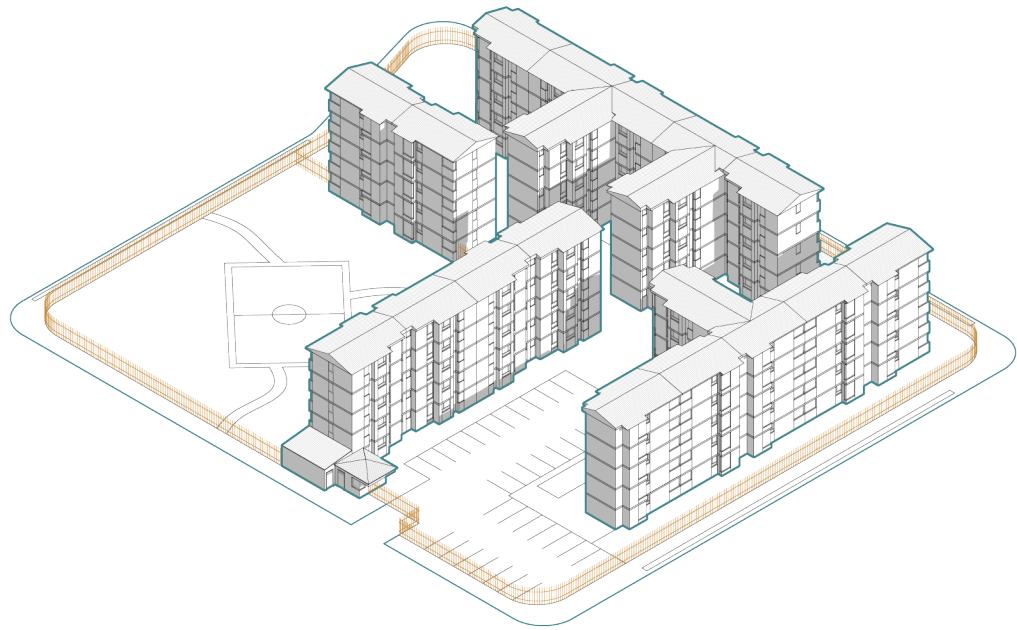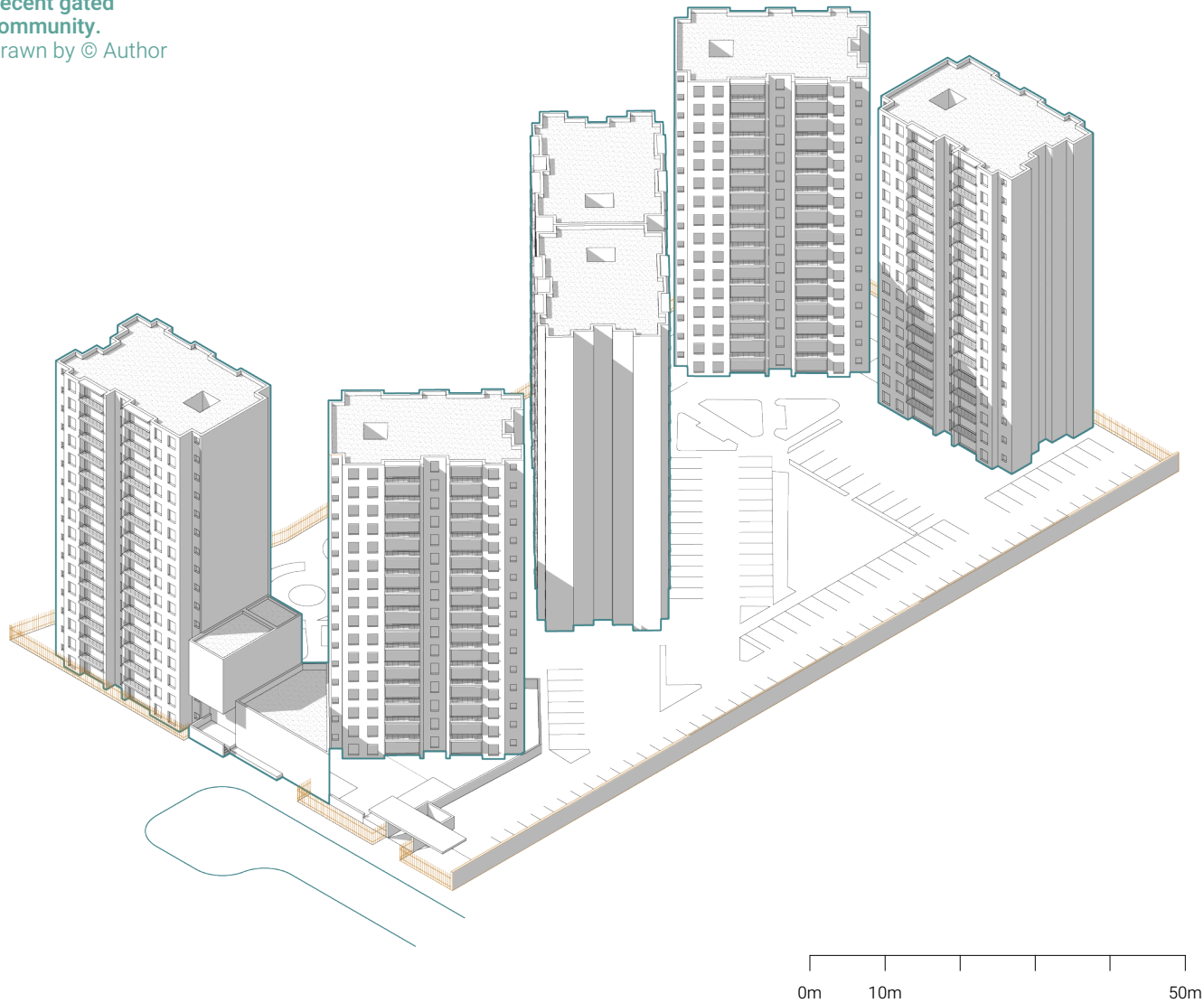
Most occupy complete blocks, usually having heights of 5 or 6 floors maximum. They usually have parks and green areas inside their fences, but not a lot of amenities, mostly just a multifunctional room. Some were developed next to gated parks of semipublic character, but were later closed and privatized for the exclusive use of the enclave.

Use	Residential
Scale	Mid rise (5 - 6 floors)
Ground floor access	Closed
Plot occupation	Free standing towers, single entrance
Flexibility	Rigid

Residential complex "El Valle de Usaquén 1" (Calle 184).
Image taken from Google Street View.

④

Recent gated community.
Drawn by © Author

Large scale gated communities, either composed of houses or apartments. They are taller and occupy bigger lots, in comparisson to the early developed enclaves. Also, they usually have more amenities, such as gym, BBQ area, and sometimes even pools. In the area they are mostly located in the Alameda neighborhood, with streets finishing in cul-de-sac.

Use	Residential
Scale	Low rise / High rise
Ground floor access	Closed
Plot occupation	Free standing towers or houses, single entrance
Flexibility	Rigid

Residential complex "Mirador de la Alameda" (Carrera 17a).
Image taken from Google Street View.

0m   10m   50m

0m   10m   50m

0m   20m   100m
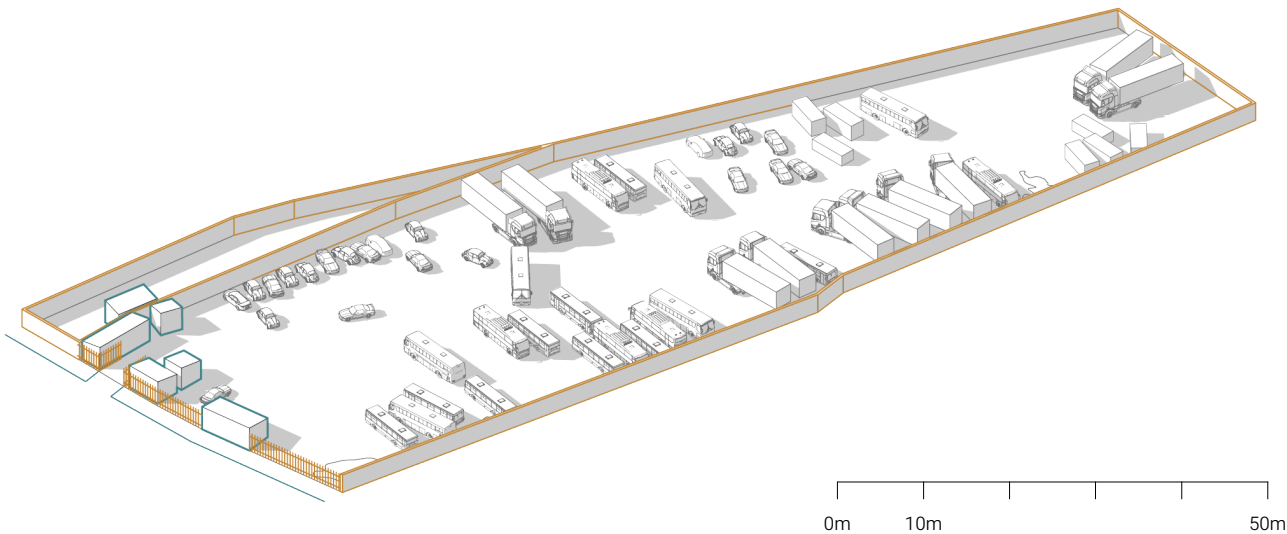
Some empty lots in the area are used as car or bus parks or as service stations. Because of the lack of programing in the spaces, they may be simultaneously used as storage, or they may have small businesses such as minimarkets or street food. They occupy large empty spaces, which present as barriers in despite of their emptiness.
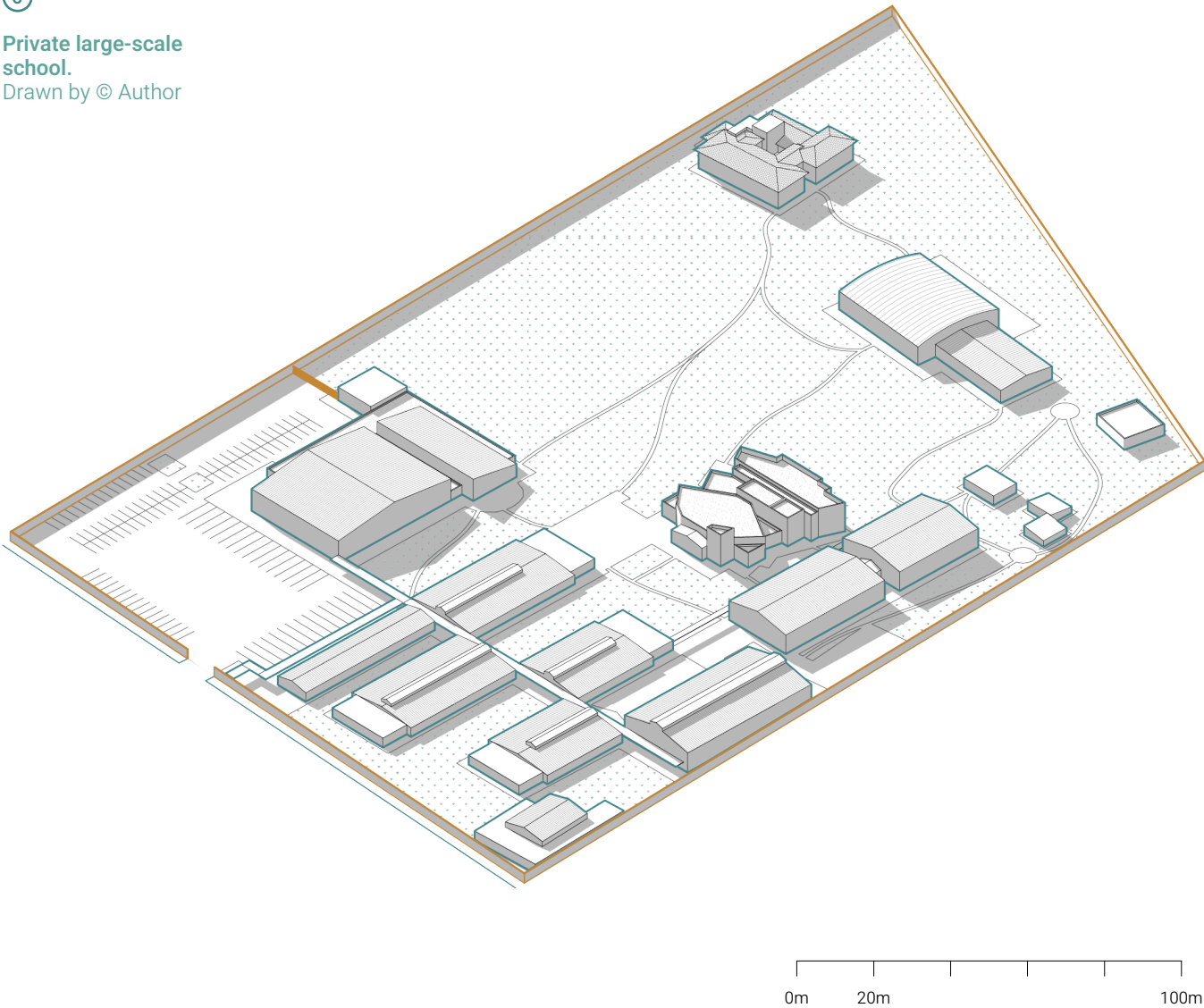
Use	Service / Parking
Scale	Low (Not built)
Ground floor access	Semi-open in parking use
Plot occupation	None
Flexibility	Flexible

Service station and parking in Calle 187.
Image taken from Google Street View.

This typology is mostly found around the Calle 170, nevertheless there are some examples inside the intervention area. The biggest example is the Santa Maria school. Large plots configured by open green spaces, sport fields, and classrooms, completely enclosed by walls.

Use	Institutional educational
Scale	Low (1 - 3 floors)
Ground floor access	Closed
Plot occupation	Dispersed buildings, single entrance
Flexibility	Limited flexibility

Santa María private school.
Image taken from Google Street View.

Section a-a' evidence how the closed empty lots meant to become the main road Carrera 15 currently work as barriers between neighborhoods. Sometimes these type of unplanned empty areas can be appropriated by the residents creating unplanned circulations and open permanence spaces. In this case the large green terrain separating the gated communities and the self-built houses, due to its enclosure, only work as a dead space surrounding a narrow path connecting both neighborhoods.

Section a-a' of the study area. Drawn by © Author

0m   10m   30m
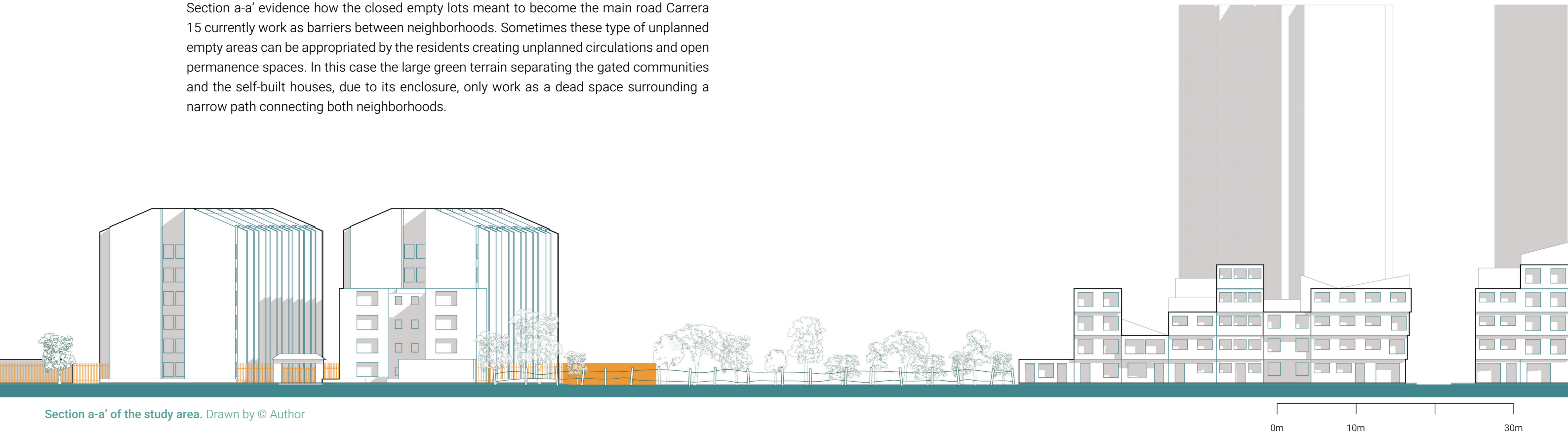
On the other hand, section b-b' shows a higher contrast in scale between the two typologies, further divided by the San Antonio canal. These natural borders can either work as connecting or fragmenting devices. Currently in the area these canals act as a fence would, but they could also be reinterpreted an built into integrating tools.

Section b-b' of the study area. Drawn by © Author

0m   10m   30m

Map 18. Socio-economic level by "estratos" in the intervention area.
Drawn by © Author. Source: SDP.

Estrato
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

---- UPZ* division
Verbenal (North)
La Uribe (South)

*UPZ: Unidad de Planeación Zonal (Zonal Planning Unit) were a sub-division of Bogotá's localities used before the current UPL.

0m   200m   600m

Graph 12: Population 2024 projection by age and gender in UPZ Verbenal and La Uribe
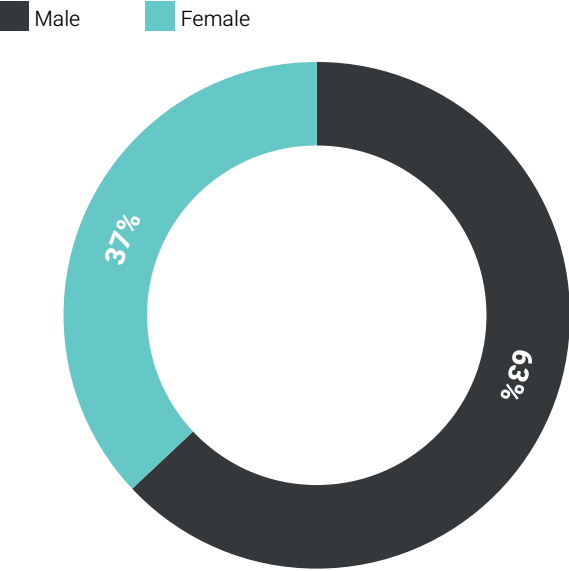Drawn by Author. Souce: DANE - CNPV 2018

Verbenal   La Uribe

Number of inhabitants

UPZ Verbenal
UPZ La Uribe

Gini coefficient
- 0,39 -0,40
- 0,41 -0,50
- 0,51 -0,60
- 0,61 -0,70
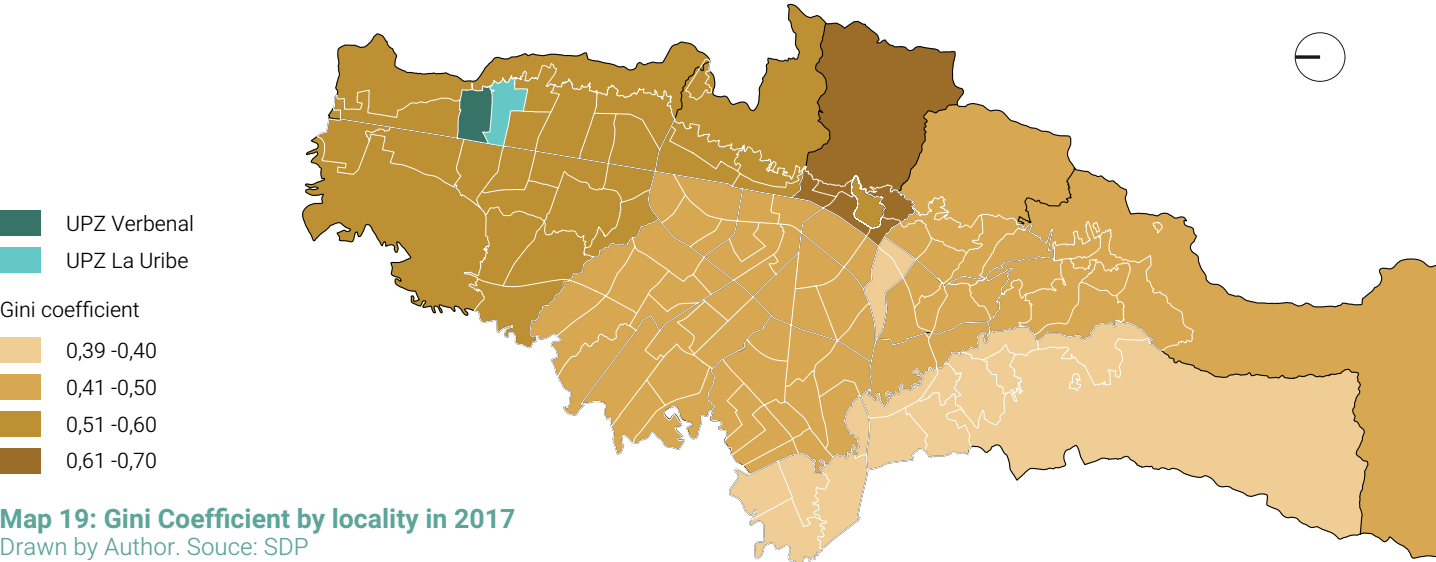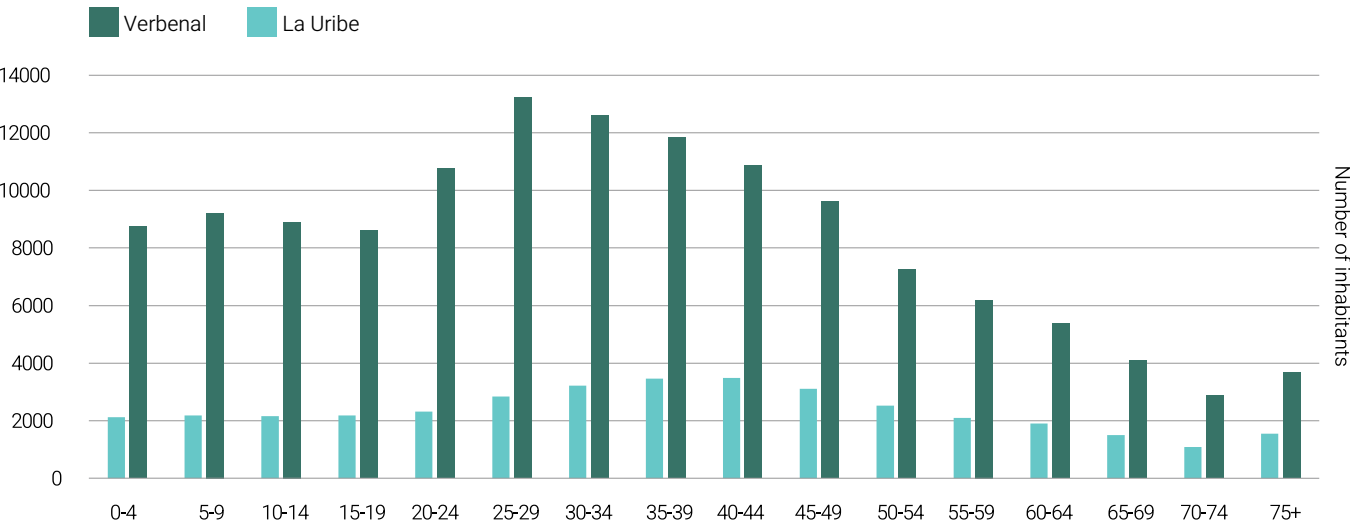
Map 19: Gini Coefficient by locality in 2017
Drawn by Author. Souce: SDP

Social analysis and dynamics

The Usaquén locality is one of the most inequal in the city shown with the Gini Coefficient showing disparities in the distribution of income and wealth (map 19). The intervention site evidences this situation by the socioeconomic level differences represented by the "Estratos" in map 18, indicating that in despite of the consolidation levels of the informally developed neighborhoods in the area, there is still a large contrast.

It becomes evident the difference in the population number between UPZ Verbenal (mostly developed informally) and UPZ La Uribe (still being developed), being higher in the first (graph 12). Additionally, Verbenal has a relatively young population with most people on the groups between 25-34 y/o, while La Uribe has a slightly older population with most people on the groups from of 35-44 y/o.

Household size is balanced between the categories, showing a predominance of smaller households (graph 13); while most of the households heads are male, reflecting a gender imbalance in household leadership (graph 14).

Graph 13: Usaquén household size, 2014.
Drawn by Author. Souce: Monografía Usaquén (SDP)

1 person   2 people   3 people   4+ people

28%
22%
27%
23%
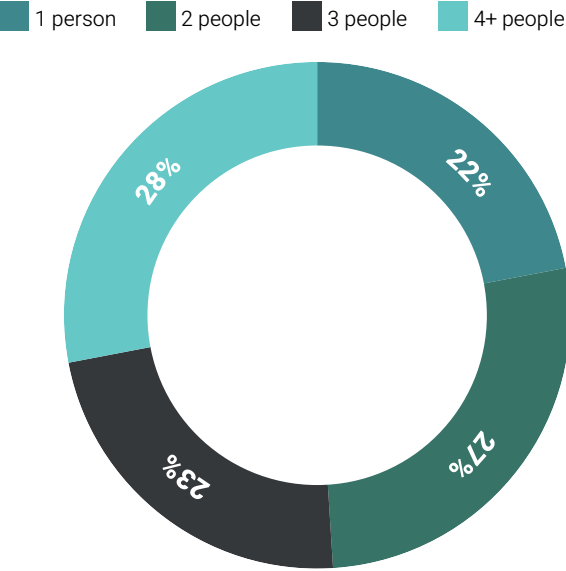
Graph 14: Usaquén household head by gender, 2014.
Drawn by Author. Souce: Monografía Usaquén (SDP)

Male   Female

37%
63%

4.3 "Plan parcial: Ciudad La Salle"

One of the criteria for selecting the study area was for it to be still in process of development, so there would be an opportunity to look and analyze the future plans outlined in the POT for the zone. Being an area with a large number of empty lots in a privileged part of the city, it is the focus of new proposals.
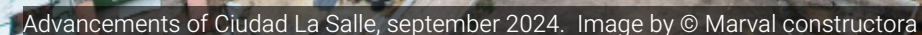
In the historical analysis, the urban plan "Ciudad La Salle" was mentioned, as it is adjacent to the intervention area and is in current construction due to its recent adoption. It is a massive housing and mixed-use project with a dynamic urban trace, with curved roads and large green spaces surrounding the housing.

It is worth analyzing the plan to understand how it would impact the zone and evaluate how its features would affect the duality emerged between the formal and the informal city. Taking a general look at which typologies of built and open spaces the development implements, its land uses, and how it connects with its context will hint how this project would act together with the thesis proposal, and which actions could be taken to integrate them in a more efficient way.

Map 20. Location Ciudad La Salle. Drawn by © Author.

Render of Ciudad La Salle. Image by © Marval constructora

Proposal for Ciudad La Salle. Image taken from SDP

Advancements of Ciudad La Salle, september 2024. Image by © Marval constructora
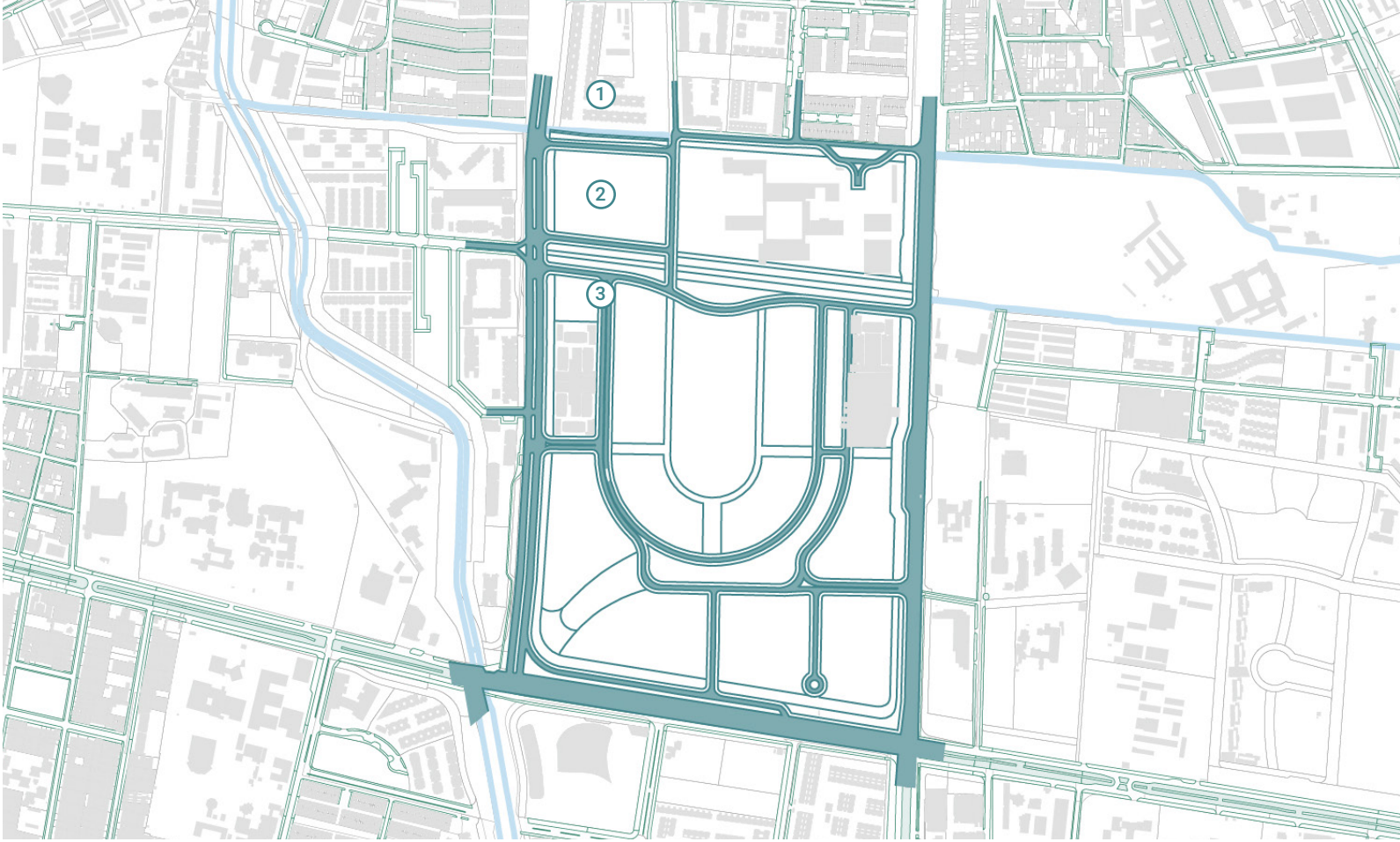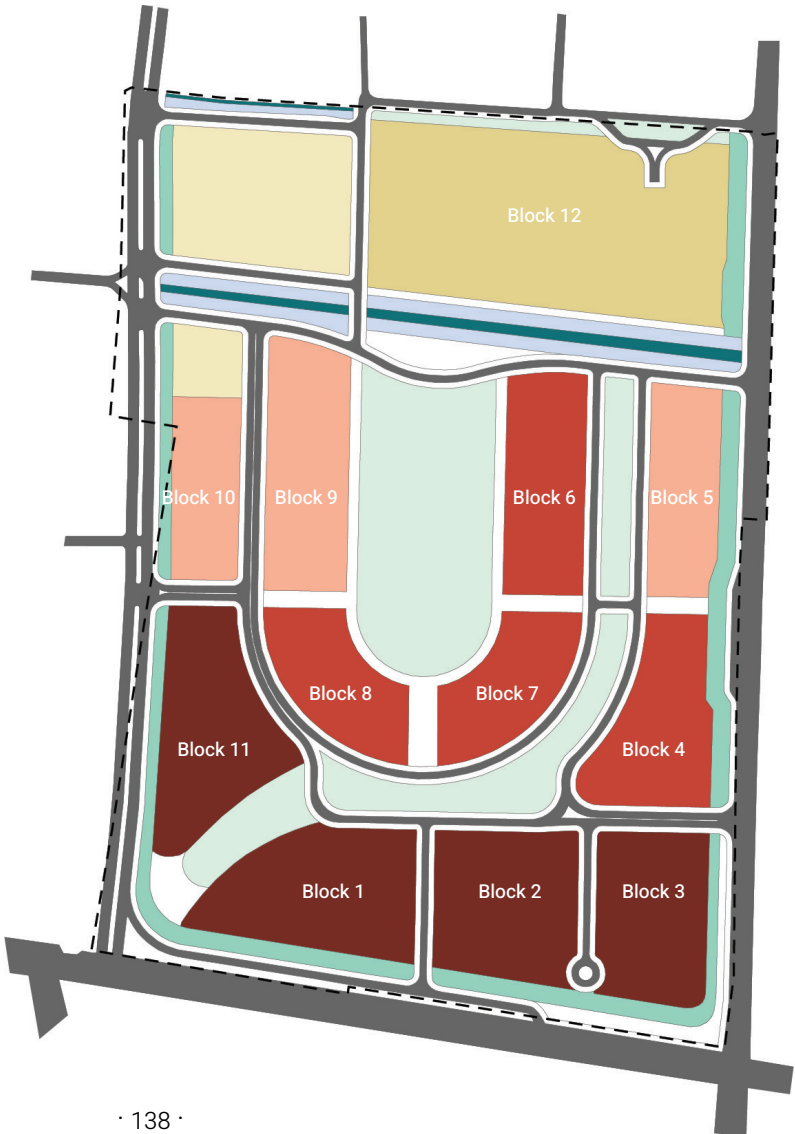
The plan

Originally the plan was adopted in 2017, and after several modifications the last version was passed in 2021, and began its construction in 2022 with the blocks 5, 10, and 12 (the latter being the relocation of the La Salle school from its current location in road Calle 170).
Its divided into 12 blocks. The blocks 1, 2, 3, and 11 are destined for a mixed program, with offices, services, metropolitan scale commerce, and housing. Blocks 4, 6, 7, and 8 are destined for housing, while blocks 5, 9, and 10 will have VIS and VIP housing (social housing). Inside blocks 5 and 9 there are proposed spaces for local commerce. Apart from the 12 built blocks, there are large spaces in the center and diagonally destined for green spaces and sports facilities.

These green spaces are part of a land transfer to the city in order to obtain benefits, such as a higher permitted density. Other land transfers contemplated in the plan are the lots in the west of the school and the north part of the block 10, given to the municipality and reserved for public facilities (currently they do not have a specific use). Additionally, there is the integration of the El Redil Canal and its ZMPA[4] into the trace of the neighborhood, placing a square and green stripes around them, as well as around the main roads for environmental preservation.

Architecturally, with the exception of the blocks adjacent to Calle 170 and of the local scale commerce in blocks 5 and 9, the housing typologies planned are gated communities following similar patterns to the adjacent neighborhoods Alameda, with a high density of towers and various private facilities inside.

Land use diagram of the urban plan.
Drawn by © Author. Source: SDP

- ■ Large scale commerce, housing (not VIS/VIP), and services
- ■ Housing (not VIS/VIP)
- ■ VIS / VIP housing (social)
- ■ Colegio La Salle (school)
- ■ Land transfer for new public facilities
- ■ Green stripes
- ■ Green areas
- ■ Road network
- ☐ Pedestrian network
- ■ Canal
- ■ ZMPA of the canals

4. ZMPA: Zona de Manejo y Preservación Ambiental (Environmental Management and Preservation Zone) is the area adjacent to bodies of water.

Opportunities

The project in general presents some issues regarding its strong zoning. Large stripes of empty open green areas surrounded by gated communties would result in little pedestrian circulation inside the neighborhood. The size of these spaces may not adapt to urban scale, further complicating their use.

The clear division between the upper part of the project with the school and other public facilities, and its lower part with mixed-uses with housing in between could contribute to the division between Calle 170 and Calle 183, acting more as a barrier than a link in despite of the new road connections. A physical barrier further strengthened by the enclosed perimeter of the new location of La Salle school.

The use of gated communities as the main housing typology serve to sell the apartments not VIS / VIP as an exclusive place for new residents, but it may reinforce exclusive physical practices regarding the residents of the social housing developments.

In despite of the general things to improve in the plan, to keep the focus on the intervention area, some elements only the northern part will be considered as opportunities for exploring their connection to the thesis proposal.

1. The San Antonio Canal and its ZMPA: Being the contact point between the urban plan and the vacant areas above it, it can work as a connection point rather than a natural barrier.

2. The upper plot for a public facility, due to its size and location, is a key point of connection. Exploring a change of its planned use into a mixed program could encourage circulation between neighborhoods.

3. The El Redil canal and its ZMPA, as shown in the plan, would continue to act as a physical obstacle. Its proximity to the plots destined for public facilities gives it the potential to complement those uses.

Diagram areas of opportunity in Ciudad La Salle. Drawn by © Author.

4.4 Desing intentions

The vertical axis formed by the empty plots between the different urban typologies will be the design focus for the project in addition with the area destined for a public facility in the north part of the "Ciudad La Salle" plan. What will be explored in the proposal is how to foment circulation from the diverse surroundings into those spaces and between the areas themselves, at the same time that they help foster a sense of community in the sector. First, the normative of the different plots will be analyzed for understanding the limitations given by the POT, which changes can be suggested in the land use or the capacity to build, and which areas are a better fit for certain uses.

Map 21. Plot division for the intervention area.
Drawn by © Author.

Scale: 0m — 200m — 600m
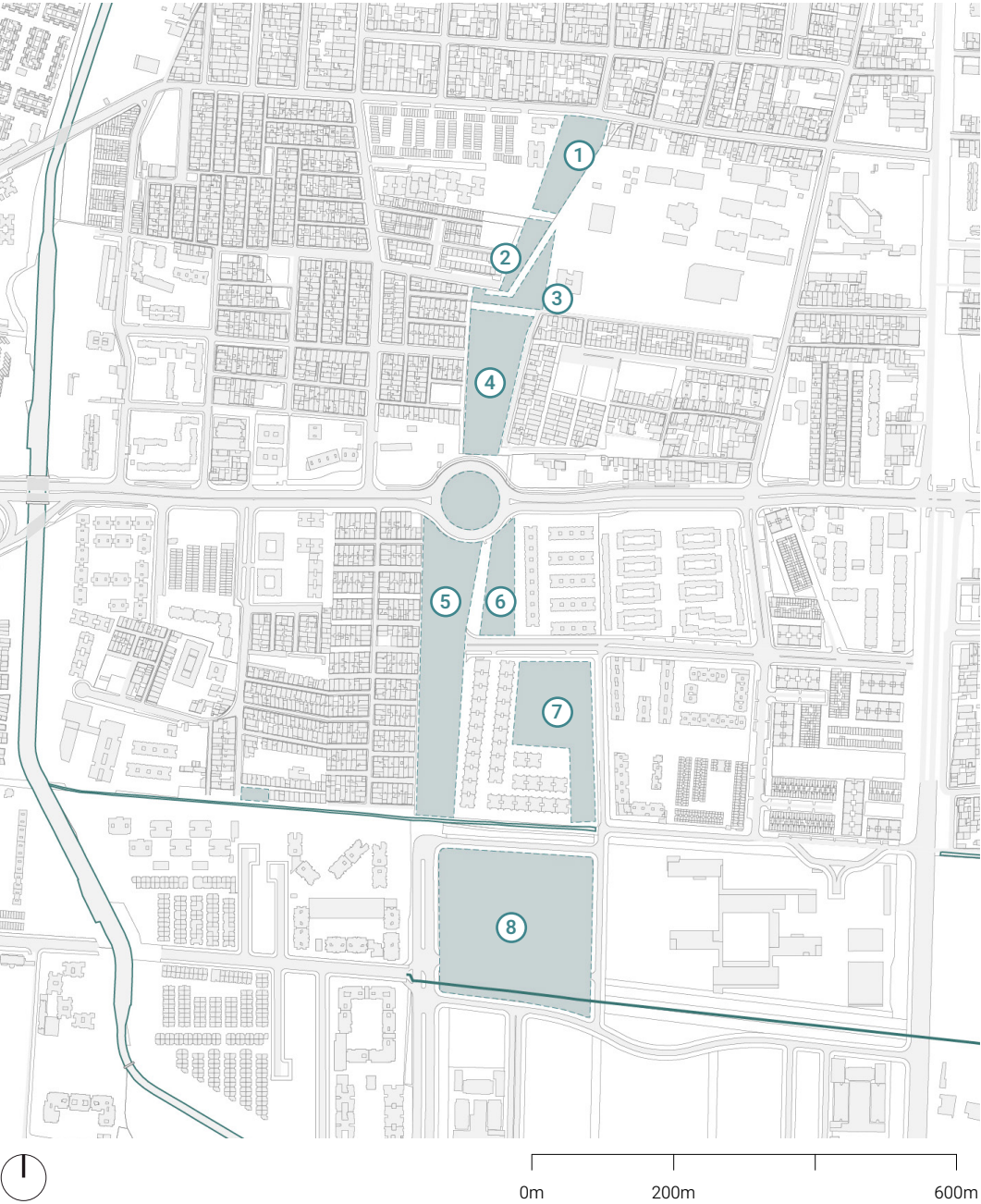
1. Current use: Parking lot
   Land use classification: Road Reserve (Reserva vial)
   Urban treatment: Consolidation
   CUS: C/5 TA
   Activity area: AAGSM

2. Current use: None
   Land use classification: Road Reserve (Reserva vial)
   Urban treatment: Consolidation
   CUS: C/3
   Activity area: AAGSM

3. Current use: Private school Santa María
   Land use classification: Road Reserve (Reserva vial)
   Urban treatment: Integral improvement (Mejoramiento integral)
   CUS: MI/3
   Activity area: AAGSM

5. Current use: None
   Land use classification: Road Reserve (Reserva vial)
   Urban treatment: Consolidation
   CUS: C/6 TA
   Activity area: AAP - Receiver of urban supports

7. Current use: None (Unfinished expansion)
   Land use classification: None (Activity area)
   Urban treatment: Consolidation
   CUS: C/6 TA
   Activity area: AAP - Receiver of urban supports

4. Current use: Mostly empty (some urban gardens)
   Land use classification: Road Reserve (Reserva vial)
   Urban treatment: Consolidation
   CUS: C/3
   Activity area: AAP - Receiver of urban supports

6. Current use: Local park
   Land use classification: Road Reserve (Reserva vial)
   Urban treatment: Consolidation
   CUS: C/6 TA
   Activity area: AAP - Receiver of urban supports

8. Current use: None
   Land use classification: Urban facility (Equipamiento urbano)
   Urban treatment: Development
   CUS: D/Rg 2
   Activity area: AAE - Receiver of economic activities

Normative glossary

Land use classification: In all the plots to intervene there are two categories of land use, that is the destined uses in the POT for each.

- Road reserve (Reserva vial): Strip of land necessary for the construction or expansion of public roads (UAECD). In this case, most of them correspond to this because they are planned to be the future expansion of Carrera 15.
- Urban facility (Equipamiento urbano): Space or building intended for educational, cultural, health, social welfare, and other services. In this case it corresponds to the land given by the "Ciudad La Salle" plan to the city.

Urban treatment (Tratamiento urbanístico): They guide the interventions that can be carried out on the land, public spaces, and buildings, providing differentiated responses to each existing condition. The ones present in the area are:

- Consolidation: Regulates the transformation of urban structures in the developed city.
- Integral improvement: Regulates planning actions for the regularization of informal human settlements, for their proper integration into the city's structure.
- Development: Regulates the urbanization of undeveloped land or set of developable land. (SDP)

CUS (Soil use coefficient): Relationship between the total area of the property and the total surface area of the project. This is connected to the urban treatment.

- C/# TA ("C" indicates the consolidation urban treatment / the number "#" is the maximum height in floors / "TA" can indicate that the typology is isolated)
- MI/# ("MI" indicates the integral improvement urban treatment / the number "#" indicates the maximum height in floors)
- D/Rg # ("D" indicates the development urban treatment / "Rg #" indicates the building coefficient range with specificities explained in the POT) In this case for the only plot with development urban treatment the range "#" is 2, meaning a coefficient of 2,00 without social housing, or 2,57 with social housing. (SDP)

Activity area: Defined zones where land uses and use-mixing levels are established, and decisions related to urban loads are made. These are divided into three categories that are themselves divided into subcategories, all three are present in the area:

- AAGSM (Area of Activity of Large Metropolitan Services): Areas designated for the location of uses that promote economic development, are necessary for the functioning of the city, provide services for all residents, house clusters of specialized social services, and allow for greater intensity of economic uses.
- AAP (Proximity Activity Area) - Receiver of urban supports: It corresponds to the areas whose main use is residential. The subcategory corresponds to the most deficient areas in densely populated urban areas, where local socioeconomic structures need to be consolidated and urban environments improved.
- AAE (Structuring Activity Area) - Receiver of economic activities: It corresponds to the areas interconnected through high- and medium-capacity corridors with the rest of the city. The subcategory includes areas where the aim is to incentivize the location of economic activities and new jobs. (SDP)
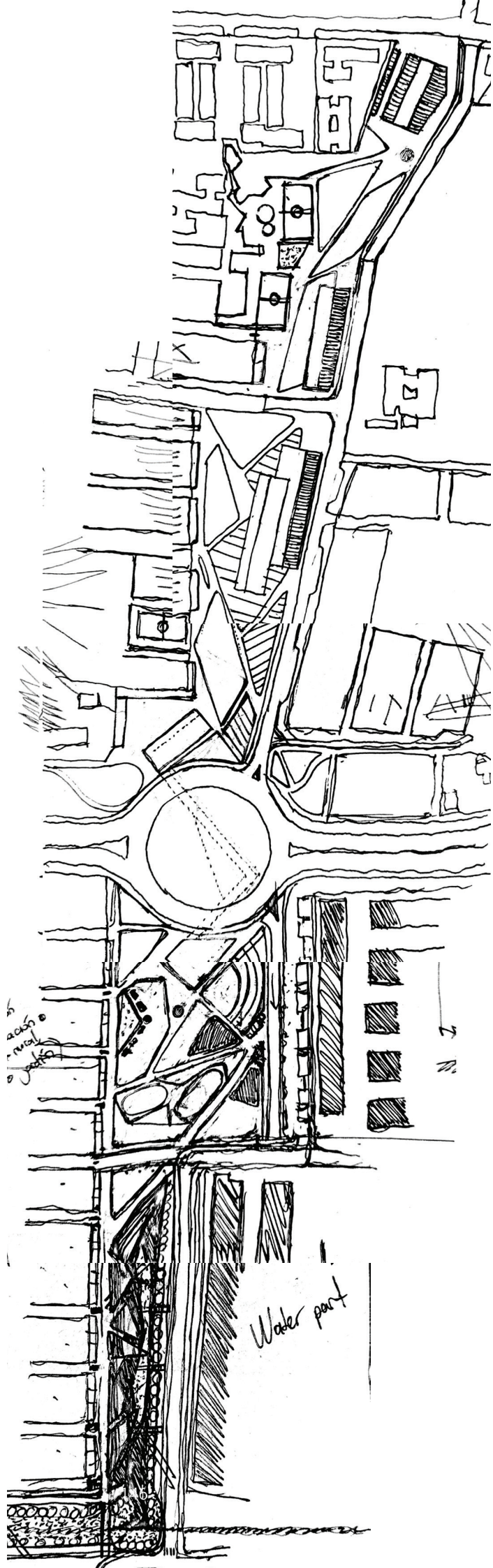
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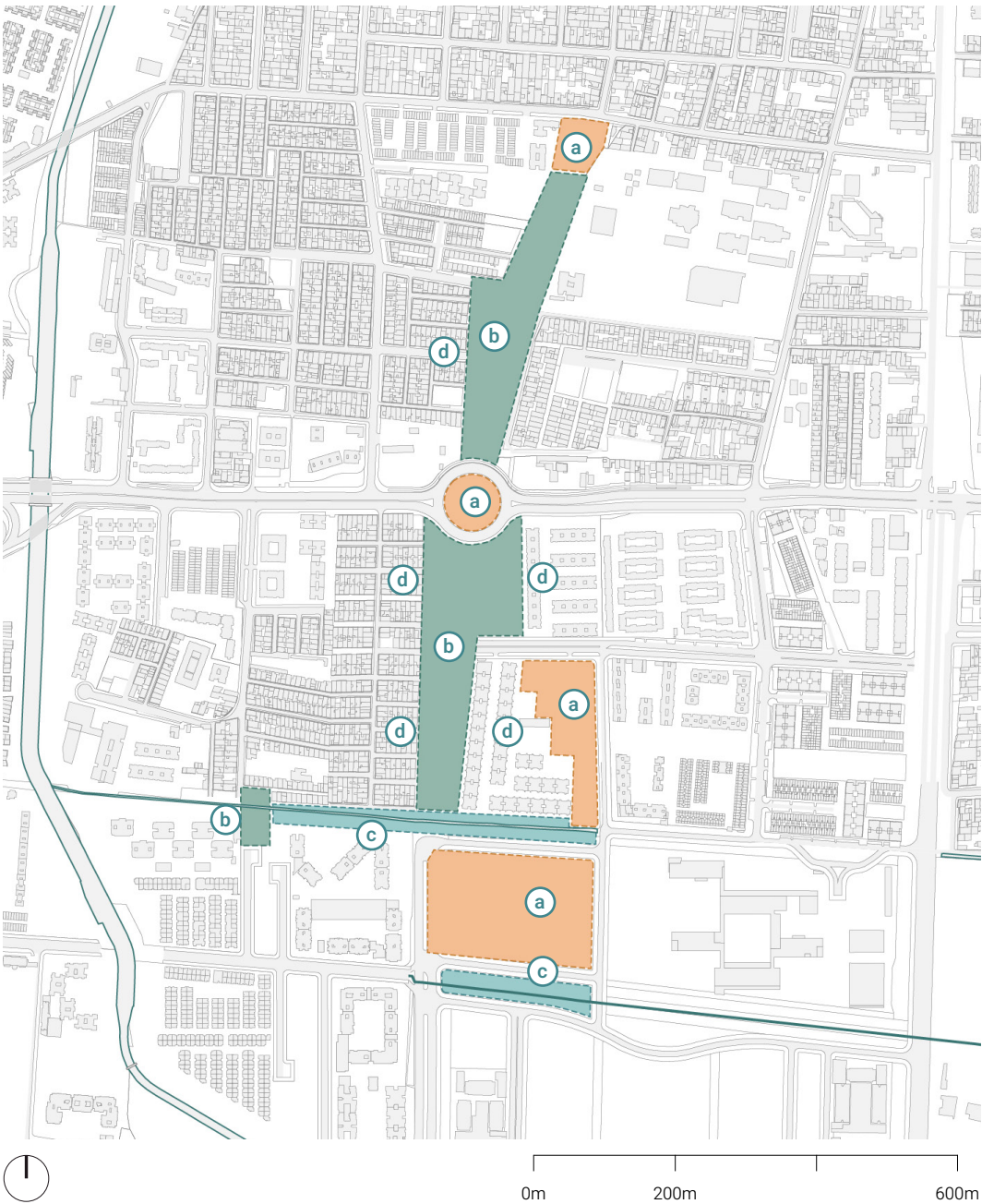
The intervention proposal follows these 4 general strategies. These will be crossed with the strategies extracted from the case-studies from the previous chapter:

a. Placing architectonic projects and devices with diverse uses such as markets, urban plant nurseries, commerce, and a more open typology of housing that encourage circulation throughout the whole area.

b. Intervening the green spaces to offer different activities for each zone and integrating them with the adjacent parks. These can contemplate water features, sports and recreational amenities, urban farming, open galleries or open study areas.

c. Using the exiting canals as an extension of the open areas rather than a barrier, introducing paths and permanence zones that activate those areas and help integrating the site.

d. Placing architectures in the existing buildings to open them into the proposed public space. One type would be the fence-opening and ground floor dynamization as those proposed by the Ciudad Isla collective (chapter 1, p. 47), and the other consists of giving ground floor activities to some of the informal houses facing the project since currently they are not open to the empty lots.

Proposal

Masterplan

Water part

0m   100m   400m

Masterplan explanation

Diagram new buildings and green areas.
Drawn by © Author

Diagram of circulation.
Drawn by © Author

Diagram of zone division.
Drawn by © Author

The proposal consists of a set of urban and architectural interventions along the axis formed by the empty plots going from the north-end of the Ciudad La Salle urban plan to the Calle 187. Along the longitudinal axis the focus is on open areas and public space, while the buildings are located in the south of the intervention site, taking advantage of the large portions of land destined for residential and public facilities uses.

Considering the current plot division, the public space is categorized into four zones with different ranges of flexibility and programming. From north to south:

- Zone 1: Open market and flexible areas.
- Zone 2: Urban agriculture
- Zone 3: Recreation and sports
- Zone 4: Water features

While each zone also has architectural interventions, these are mostly complementary to the open spaces. The buildings proposed in the south of the project are focused on residential alternatives to gated communities, these are divided into two categories:

- Zone 5: As an alternative to the current development of a gated community following the same morphology as the existing one, this intervention focuses on bringing mixed-uses into the block, playing with the private and public areas inside to create a sort of superblock that brings people into the currently exclusionary typology.
- Zone 6: Taking advantage of the large size of the plot destined for a public facility, another typology of housing is proposed, creating courtyards with a more open layout so that circulation inside the block is permitted. Also encouraging a mixture of uses in the ground floor, creating a dynamic space in this plot that serves as a connection between the first 4 zones and the Ciudad La Salle urban plan.

Green areas
New buildings

Main pedestrian circulation
Bicycle lanes
New slow vehicular roads

Zone 1   Zone 4
Zone 2   Zone 5
Zone 3   Zone 6

Incremental architecture

Most of the buildings adjacent to the project along its longitudinal axis do not have an open façade facing it, in some cases because it is a gated community surrounded by a fence, and for the most part they are the informally built houses that being next to a series of private and inaccessible plots closed themselves in that direction at the ground level. As a general strategy some architectural small-scale interventions are implemented at ground level to activate those facades towards the new public space.

For gated communities, mainly represented by the one facing the project in the zone 3 since it's the one with more space to place new buildings, the proposal places a series of modular pieces that could contain diverse uses and activate the ground floor, favoring circulation next to the building.

As for the informally developed houses that are more present, a more adaptable solution based also on modular interventions that can be self-built give the residents of the blocks options to use that space for economical profit, community-managed facilities, or free spaces used for gardening or mural paintings.
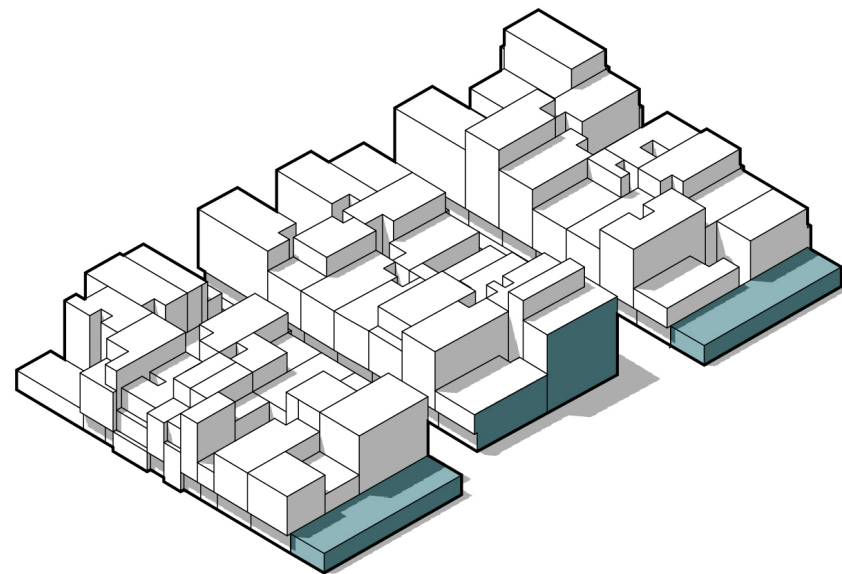
Added architecture - Informal houses. Drawn by © Author.
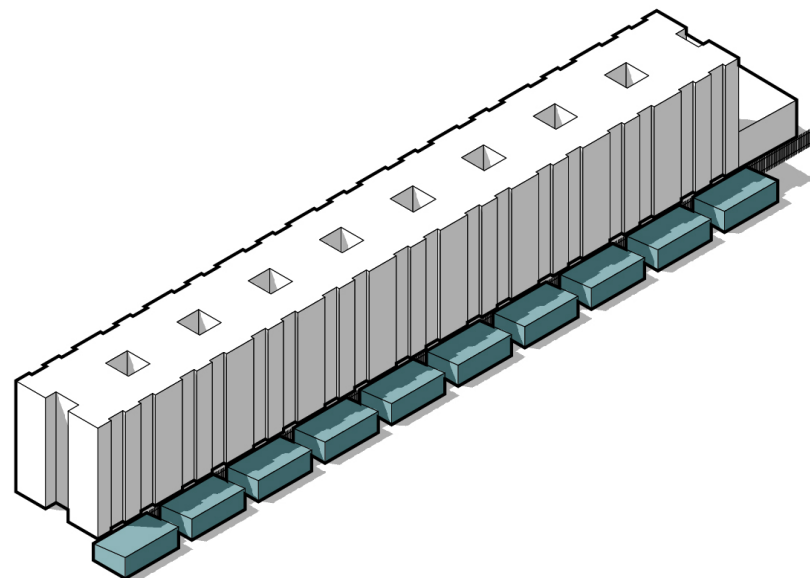
Added architecture - Gated community. Drawn by © Author.
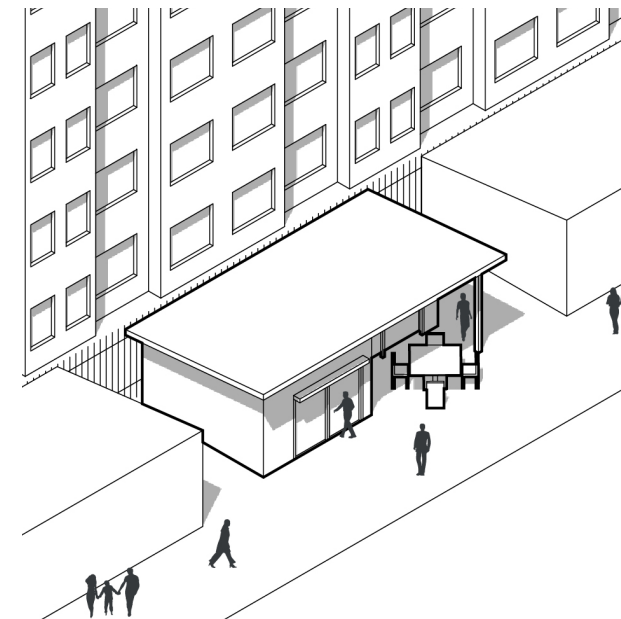
Gated community module - Gallery. Drawn by © Author.

Informal houses - Retail / Commerce . Drawn by © Author.

Gated community module - Workshop. Drawn by © Author.
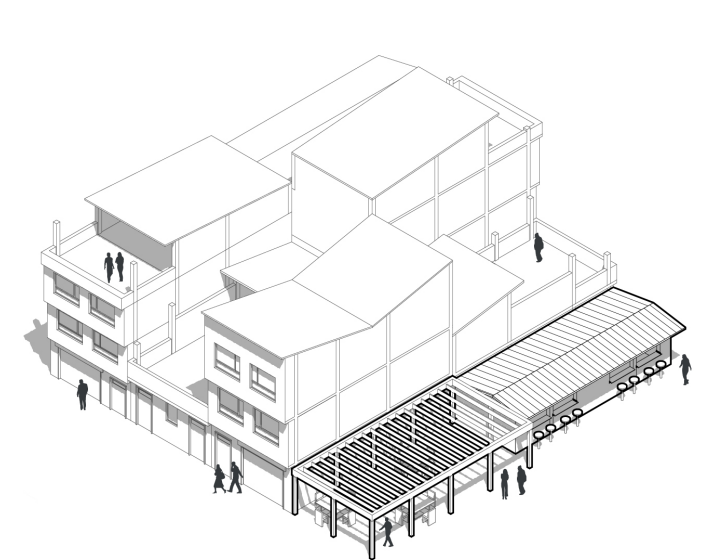
Informal houses - Cultural hub. Drawn by © Author.

Gated community module - Bike repair. Drawn by © Author.
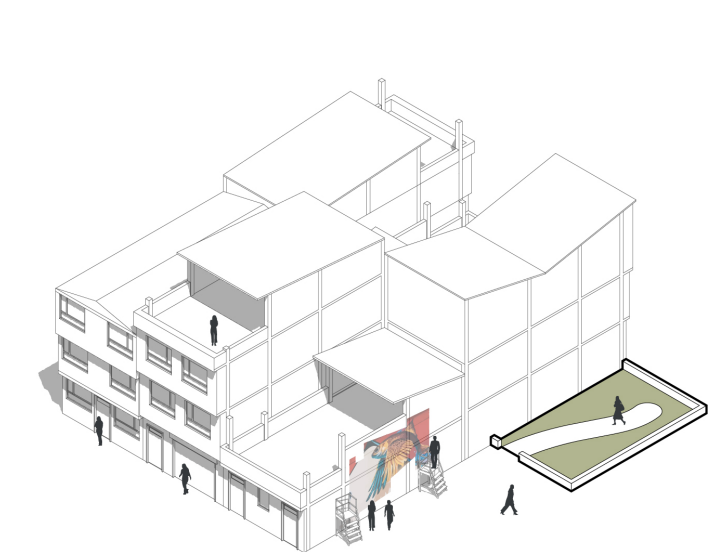
Informal houses - Open spaces. Drawn by © Author.

0m   10m   50m

①
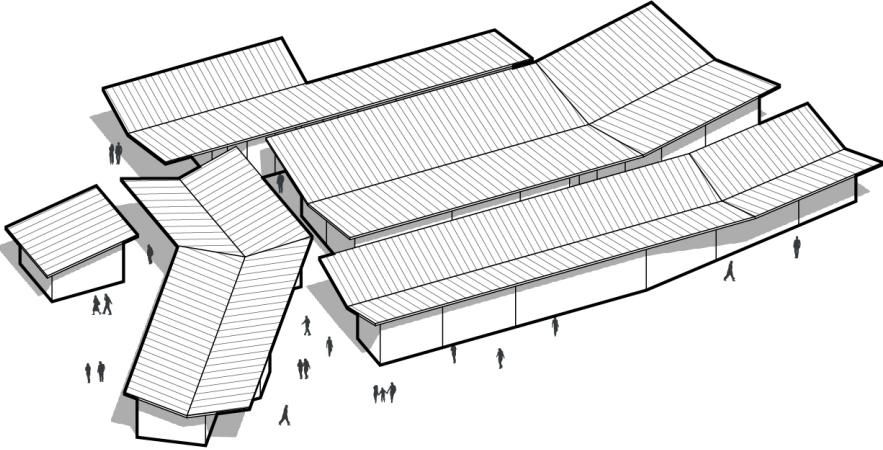
Open market .
Drawn by © Author.

②
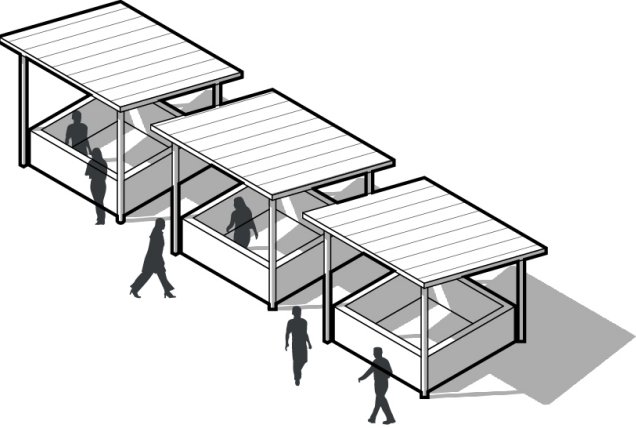
Temporal commerce spots.
Drawn by © Author.

③

Currently in this zone the space is mainly used by an empty plot functioning as a parking lot and as a place for some formal and informal commercial activities such as a mini-market and food stalls. The proposal for this area contemplates using the broad space used by the parking lot and turning it into an open market that can host middle and small-scale commerce, providing formal spaces for the population living from informal economic activities. The rest is blended with the existing local park, and in the south border where the area meets with zone 3 (agricultural purposes), a roofed open structure is lifted to complement both the commercial activities from the market and the community activities from the adjacent zone.

Roofed open structure.
Drawn by © Author.

Masterplan zoom - Zone 1.
Drawn by © Author

0m 10m 50m
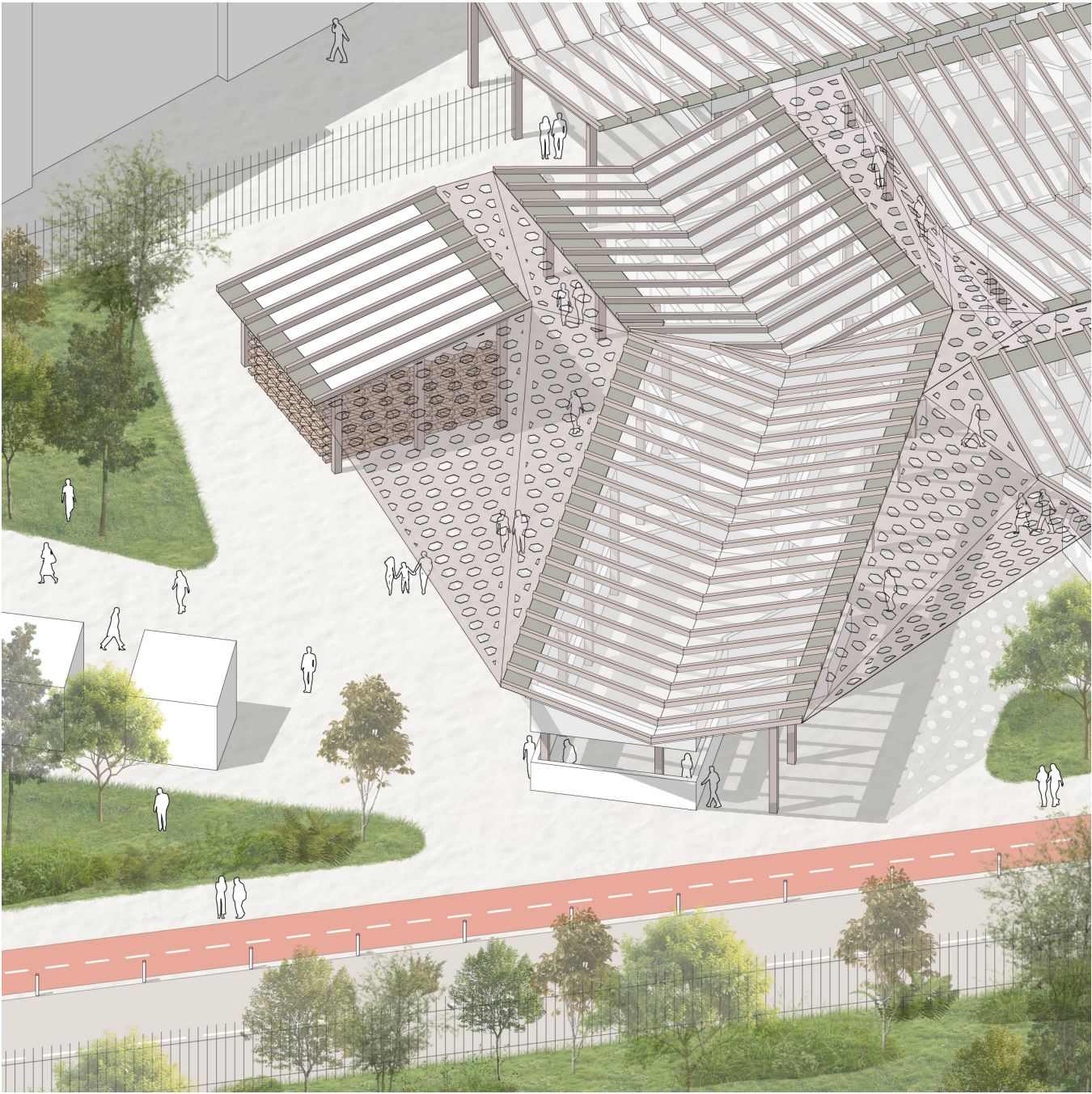
Close-up. Open market. Zone 1.
Drawn by © Author

0m   10m   50m

①
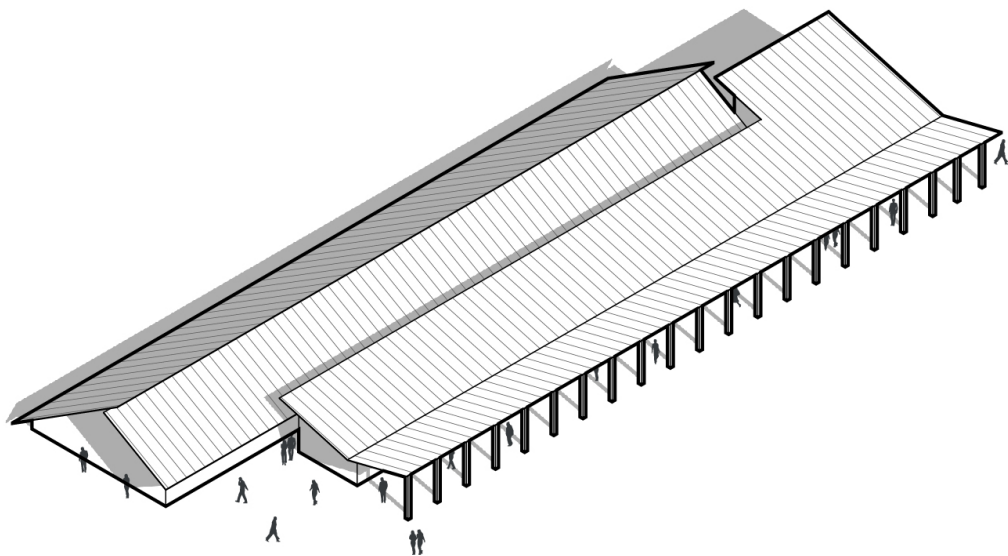
Plant nursery and agricultural education hub.
Drawn by © Author.

②
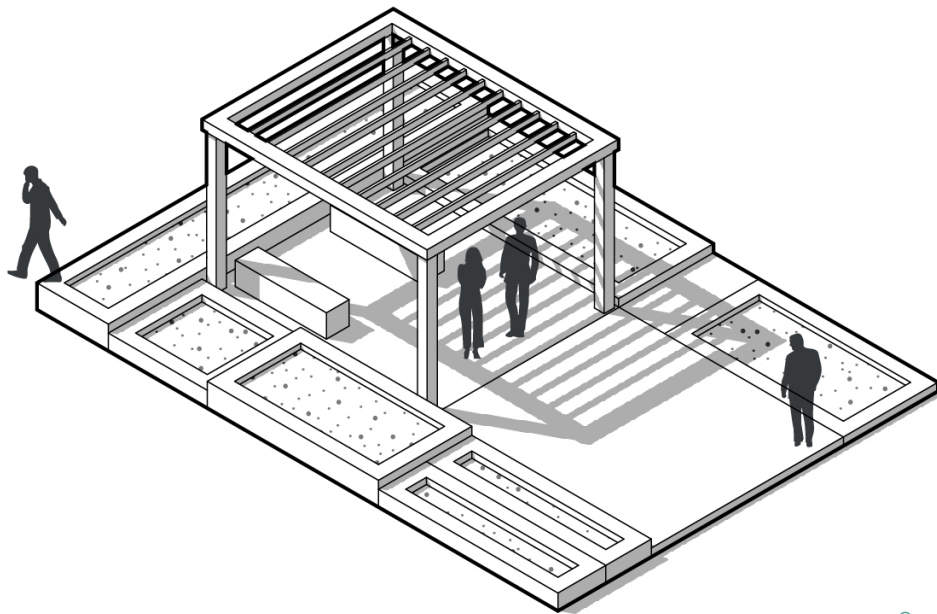
Open gardens with meeting zones.
Drawn by © Author.

This zone is mostly empty, but on it east border it has some gardens and is also it is also used as a place for small farm animals. The proposal is to use that agricultural character of the area and potentiate it into an activity where all the community can take part, encouraging engagement from both sides. The gardens are organized in a different way to facilitate the circulation and engagement with the gardens, while a plant nursery together with an agricultural education hub are implanted in the north border of the zone with the objective of teaching the population not only how to properly grow food, but also how it can become a productive activity for the whole community. In the south border next to the roundabout, a new building and a bridge connect both sides of Calle 183 (p. 166).

0m   10m   50m

Close-up. Plant nursery and agricultural education hub. Zone 2.
Drawn by © Author

0m   10m   50m
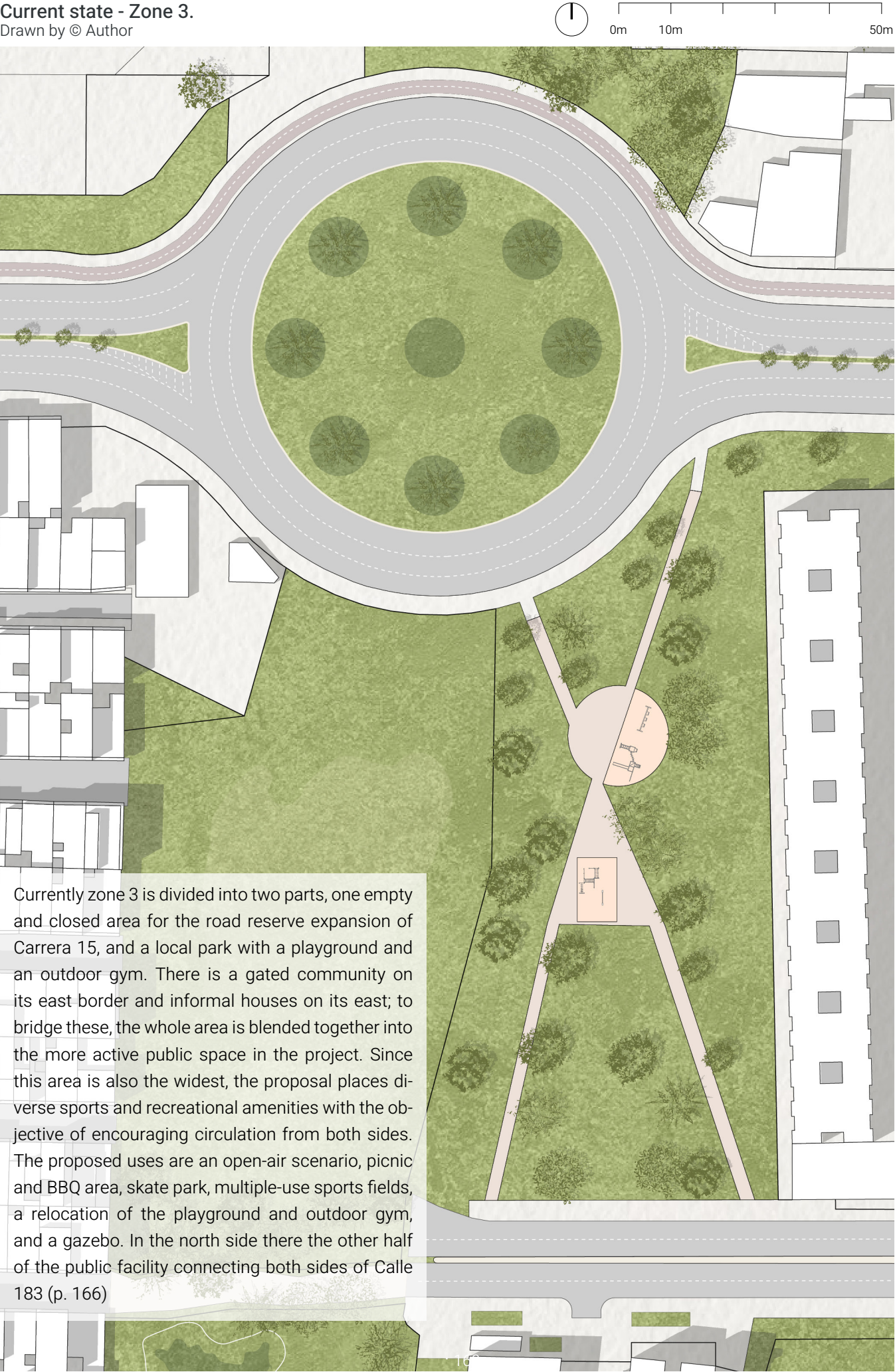
Currently zone 3 is divided into two parts, one empty and closed area for the road reserve expansion of Carrera 15, and a local park with a playground and an outdoor gym. There is a gated community on its east border and informal houses on its east; to bridge these, the whole area is blended together into the more active public space in the project. Since this area is also the widest, the proposal places diverse sports and recreational amenities with the objective of encouraging circulation from both sides. The proposed uses are an open-air scenario, picnic and BBQ area, skate park, multiple-use sports fields, a relocation of the playground and outdoor gym, and a gazebo. In the north side there the other half of the public facility connecting both sides of Calle 183 (p. 166)
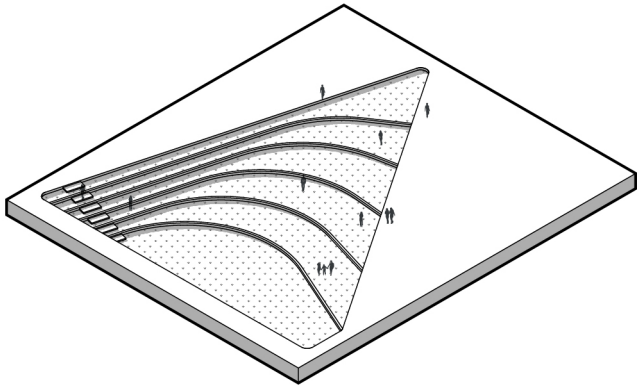
Open-air scenario.
Drawn by © Author.
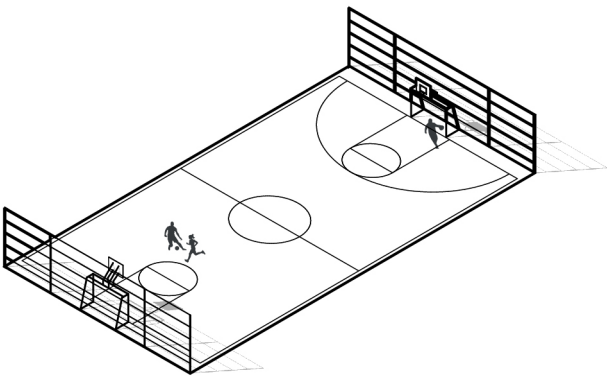
Multiple-use sports fields.
Drawn by © Author.
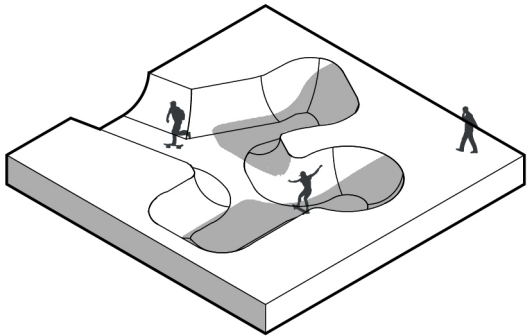
Skate park.
Drawn by © Author.
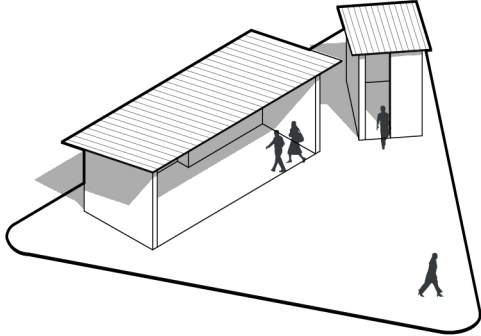
BBQ area.
Drawn by © Author.
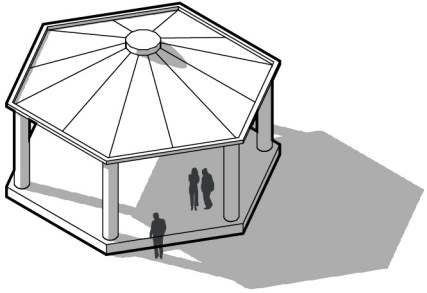
Gazebo.
Drawn by © Author.
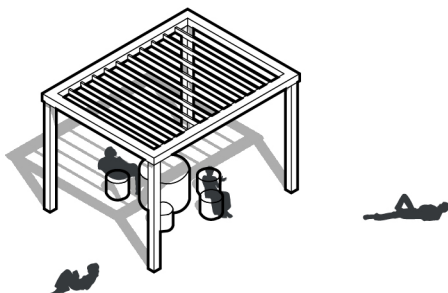
Picnic area.
Drawn by © Author.

0m   10m   50m

Close-up. Sports and recreational spots. Zone 3.
Drawn by © Author
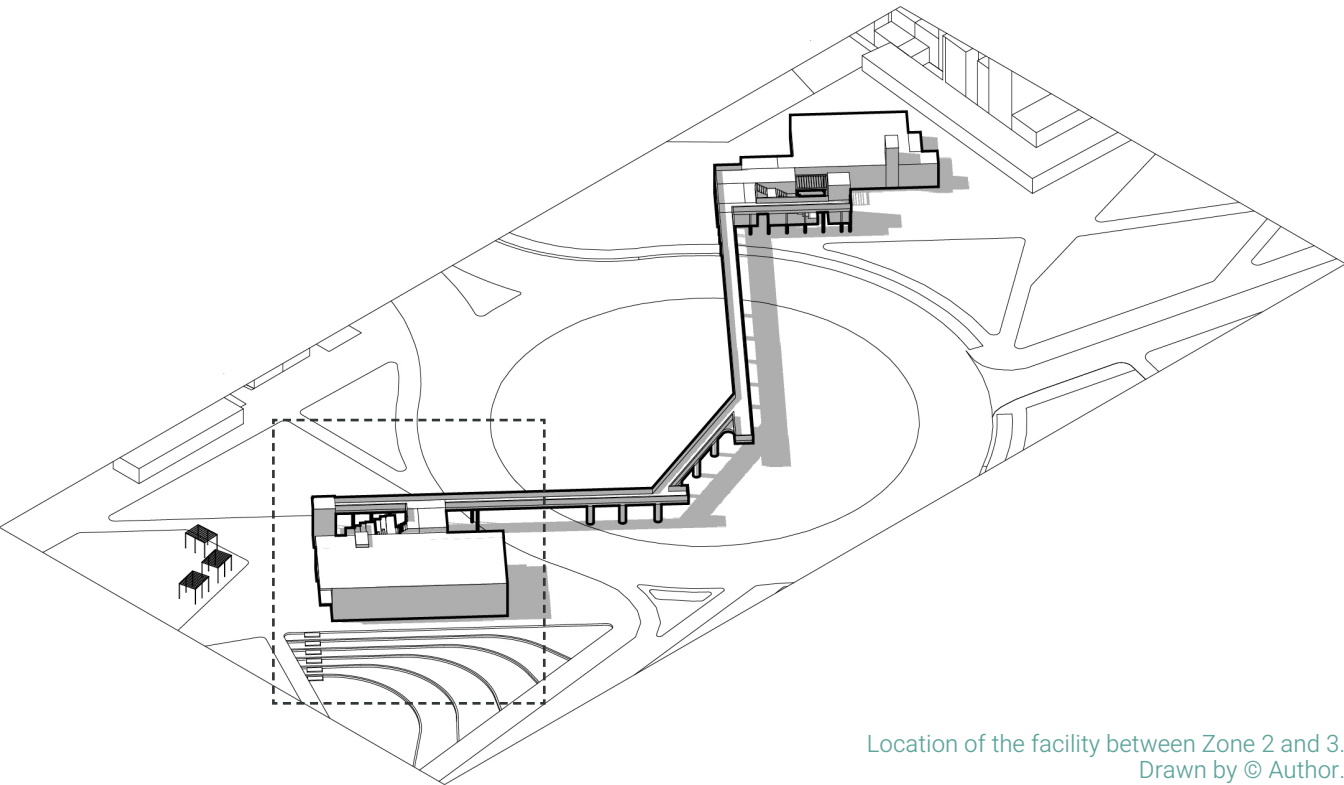
Location of the facility between Zone 2 and 3.
Drawn by © Author.

Between zone 2 and 3 the roundabout of Calle 183 (intended to also receive the car flow from the 6-lane expansion of Carrera 15) works as a barrier and a break to the continuity of the public space. The proposal contemplates a public facility building and a bridge that can both facilitate pedestrian circulation between zones and activate these areas to attract people into crossing.

Given the large number of schools and universities that this sector of the city has, the proposed use for this facility is a study hub, featuring classrooms, multifunctional rooms, quiet study areas, and audio-visual rooms that serve as a space for the community to not limit education for the large private enclaves that most of the schools and universities in the area represent.

The bridge has terraced stay places in both ends to ensure activity and provide a more dynamic infrastructure.

Exploded axonometric of the south part of the facility. Zone 3.
Drawn by © Author.

Close-up. Study hub. South part on Zone 3.
Drawn by © Author

0m   10m   50m

①
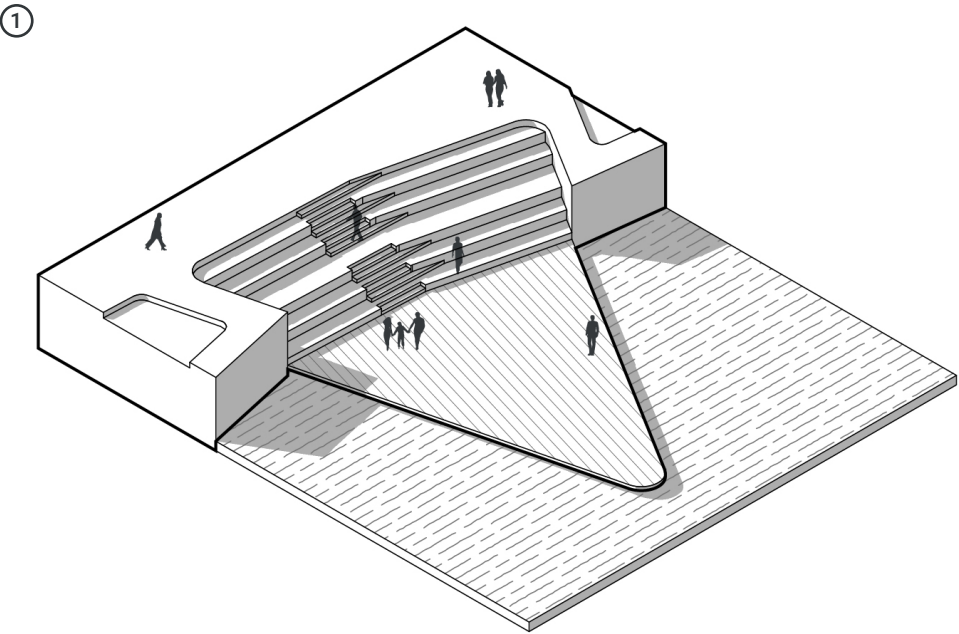
Terraced platform.
Drawn by © Author.

②

Bridge.
Drawn by © Author.

This is the narrowest of the zones, it sits between one of the most vulnerable parts of the informally developed neighborhoods next to the San Antonio Canal and a gated community which because of its form it works only as a wall. Taking the canal as an opportunity, the proposal expands the blue infrastructure into a constructed wetland and a series of raingardens. Circulation in this area focuses on its west border towards the informal houses proving them with public space where three terraced platforms go into the wetland creating more isolated and flexible spaces for staying. A series of bridges connect this zone with its east border and with zone 6 in its south, where the plan Ciudad La Salle ends.

③

Raingarden.
Drawn by © Author.

Masterplan zoom - Zone 4.
Drawn by © Author

0m 10m 50m

Close-up. Terraced platform. Zone 4.
Drawn by © Author

0m   10m   50m

At the east side of the block of the gated community adjacent to zone 4, there is currently an empty lot which was going to be used as a continuity of the existing development inside the block, with the same typology and form. For unknown reasons this plan stopped and since years ago at the south border of the block there are the remains of the initiated construction of the building. Considering that the whole block is property of the same developer, the proposal consists of an alternative to the existing building, trying a different, more open layout, with mixed-uses on the ground floor, generating courtyards that invite circulation inside the block but also provides a more closed private space for its residents. Showing how even using the same building, a more dynamic project can be achieved.

From this

To this

Openness diagram.
Drawn by © Author.
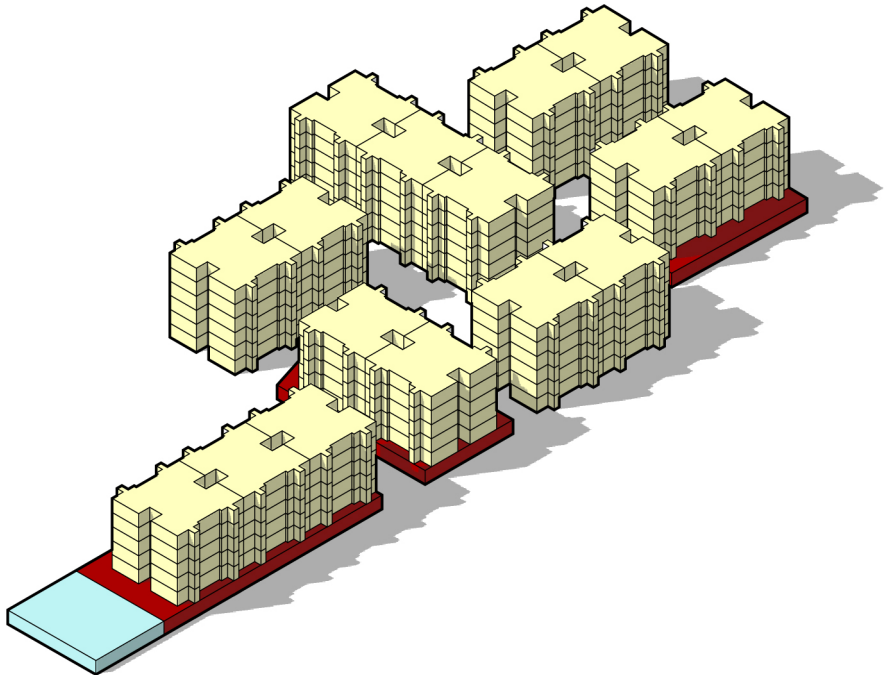
Residential
Commercial
Public facilities

Proposed uses. Zone 5.
Drawn by © Author.

0m   10m   50m

Axonometric .Zone 5.
Drawn by © Author

0m   10m   50m
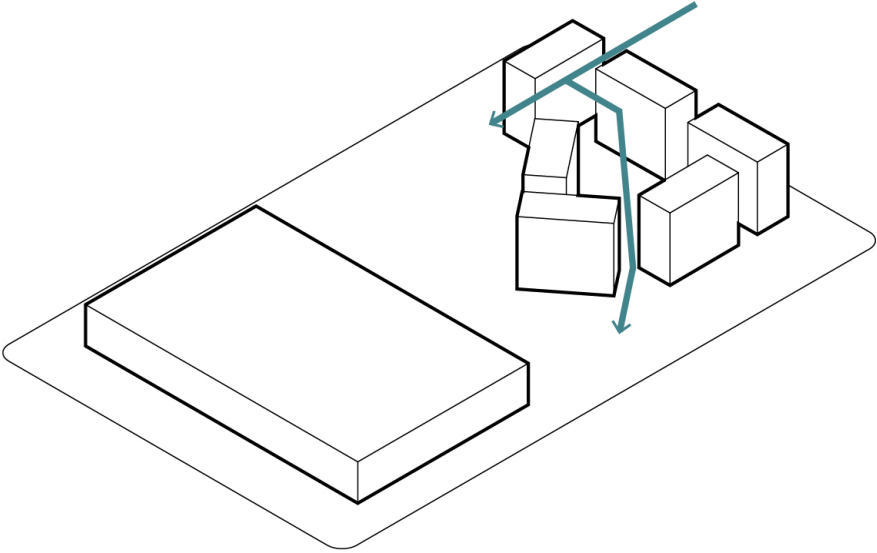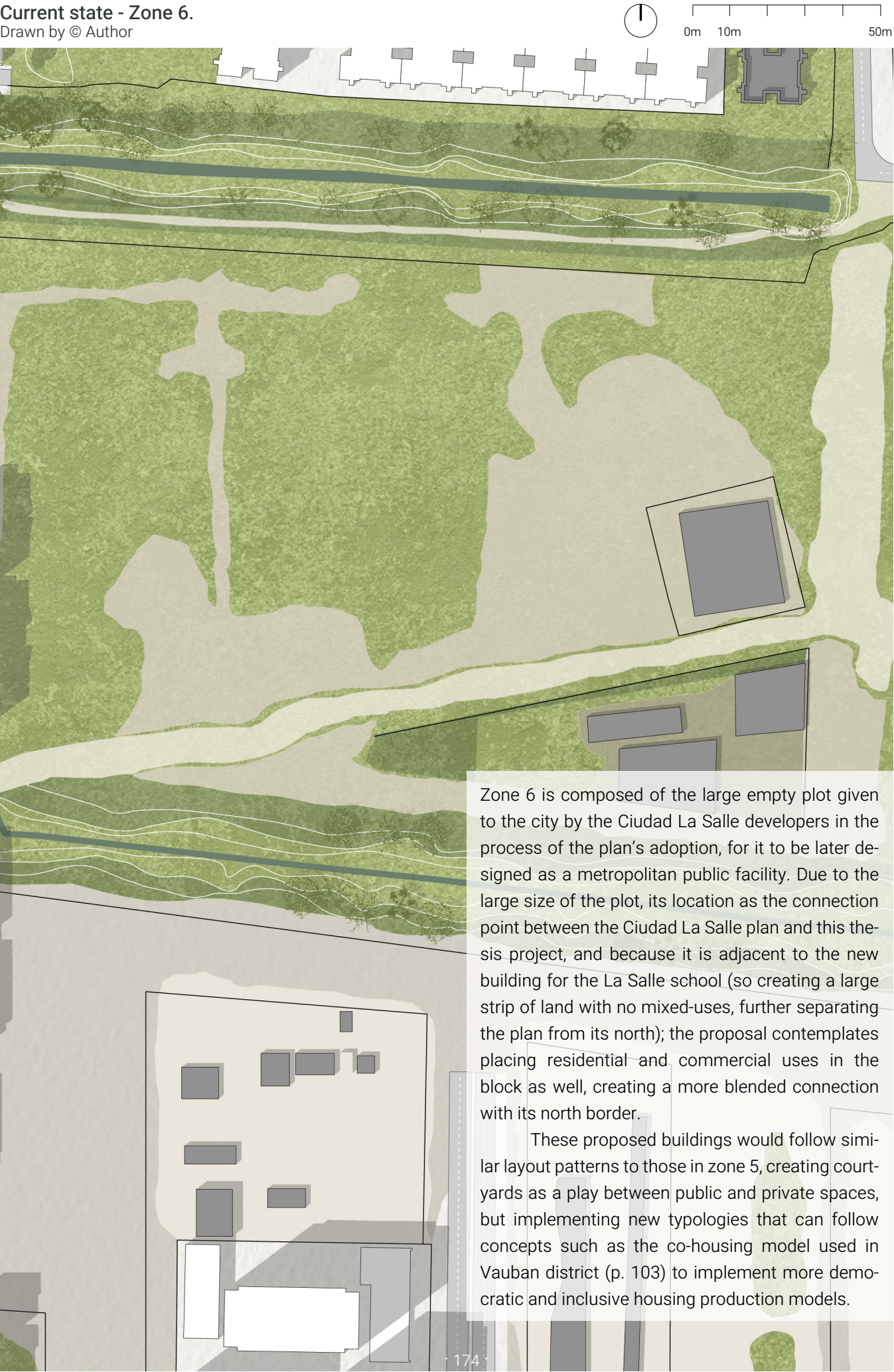
Housing blending into the block.
Drawn by © Author.

Zone 6 is composed of the large empty plot given to the city by the Ciudad La Salle developers in the process of the plan's adoption, for it to be later designed as a metropolitan public facility. Due to the large size of the plot, its location as the connection point between the Ciudad La Salle plan and this thesis project, and because it is adjacent to the new building for the La Salle school (so creating a large strip of land with no mixed-uses, further separating the plan from its north); the proposal contemplates placing residential and commercial uses in the block as well, creating a more blended connection with its north border.

These proposed buildings would follow similar layout patterns to those in zone 5, creating courtyards as a play between public and private spaces, but implementing new typologies that can follow concepts such as the co-housing model used in Vauban district (p. 103) to implement more democratic and inclusive housing production models.

	Residential
	Commercial
	Public facilities

Proposed uses. Zone 6.
Drawn by © Author.

0m   10m   50m

Axonometric .Zone 6.
Drawn by © Author

Perspective Plant nursery and agricultural education hub. Zone 2.
Drawn by © Author

Perspective study hub. Zone 3.
Drawn by © Author

Conclusions

The categories extracted at the end of the third chapter for the comparison of the case studies are also used to evaluate the proposal:

- **Public space activation:** The design tries to generate a mixture of uses and a diversity of functions in its longitudinal axis in hopes of encouraging the active use of these spaces as a link between the urban forms. It prioritizes pedestrian and bicycle circulation, while using the current plans of the city for providing new social and mobility infrastructure.
- **Public participation:** The available census data and the requirements made in other similar situations were taken as a reference; however, an active involvement of the community would be ideal when designing these types of interventions, being a limitation of the proposal.
- **Social inclusion:** The proposal focuses on providing a physical environment that can foster different encounters and a sense of community. The role of architects and urban planners is still limited when focusing on social issues, since there is a need for institutional support, accompaniment, and a proper administration for plans like this in the long-term, which seems to be the biggest challenge in the city.
- **Usability and maintenance:** The flexibility of the spaces was considered, providing several plazas and large green spaces with minimal physical infrastructure, trying to ensure adaptability from its users. However, due to the large size of the intervention, with the objective of encouraging the use of the spaces, there is a share of programmed areas. While the proposal uses materials that facilitate the maintenance, there is also a large role that the administration plays in its conservation.
- **Gentrification risk:** The project mostly focuses on providing infrastructure and public spaces for an intermediate space between de existing neighborhoods. When facing the informally developed areas, it gives support spaces and a better continuity of their open areas. In addition, the spaces such as the market and the urban farms open economical spaces for the informally employed, including the most vulnerable populations, while trying to avoid a displacement of the population.
- **Adaptability:** Mostly using the non-site-specific strategies extracted from the case-study analysis, the proposal focuses on diverse interventions that can be used for different contexts regarding the integration of a place and opening the city between isolated typologies. Going from the public space interventions, into the economical infrastructure intended for the most vulnerable population, and looking at other ways to create more open housing, the elements can be used and reinterpreted for other similar issues.

A connected contrast

This thesis focused on the places where gated communities meet with informally developed neighborhoods. While both are research issues on their own, these spaces of contrast represent an interesting object of study as a consequence of a city being developed outside the formal planning, like most cities (at least in part) grew worldwide.

In a city like Bogotá, where the word contrast can work as a definition, seeing how those physical and social differences can go from representing a separation into becoming a connected but diverse cityscape would be an ideal scenario. The current POT and the general mentality into constructing a more open and connected city based on the 15-minute city concept are a starting point, however, the challenges of the diverse administrations of the city, focusing more on politics than actually formulating a plan for the future, are still the main issue.

Gated communities can mutate into a more open typology and still keep a degree of privacy, and the informally developed neighborhoods can share their dynamic urban life at the same time that they are provided with proper public space and infrastructure. Working with the current situation, recognizing why it came to be, working into its improvement, and learning from it to avoid worsening the division, are the tools that architects and urban planners should follow into building more equal and connected urban environment.

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