

## 1. Research notes



# An emblematic model of a car-free day: Bogotá's Ciclovía

Research notes

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End: May 2022

Every Sunday for almost 50 years, the City of Bogotá has closed off a continuous network of streets and avenues, banning motorized vehicles so that residents can safely go for a walk or ride a bicycle safely. What began as an activist and community initiative progressively became institutionalized and is now a core measure in the city's public policy with regards to leisure and improving the quality of life. A source of inspiration for the world's largest cities today, how did this event of unprecedented magnitude develop?

Research participants

- Mobile Lives Forum

## Key results

Ciclovía began as a large militant demonstration organized in 1974 to protest how cars dominated the public space of the Colombian capital. Becoming gradually more institutionalized, it is now a pillar of the city's urban policy for leisure and improving the quality of life of the inhabitants. A true local institution, it requires significant organization and logistical support to safely manage the 127 kilometers of lanes dedicated every Sunday to active modes. There is no doubt that this event of unprecedented scale is a hugely popular success.

## The history of Ciclovía: from an activist demonstration to an institutionalized event

Jaime Ortiz Mariño, today an architect and consultant on mobility policies, was the instigator of the "Great Pedal Demonstration" (Gran Manifestación del Pedal) organized in 1974 to protest the proliferation of cars in the city. Inspired by the demands of the American youth and counterculture communities, this movement elevated the bicycle as a symbol of resistance, at the heart of an alternative social and environmental project for the city. A few years later, the event became institutionalized, with the city closing off four corridors of traffic, thus forming a safe network of about 20 kilometers. In the 1980's the event was extended and officially held every Sunday, however a lack of means and political support weakened its development. It was in the 1990s that Ciclovía grew in scope, under the impetus of mayors Antanas Mockus and Enrique Peñalosa who decided to increase its funding tenfold, to open funding to private partners and to strengthen its recreational dimension. By the end of the 1990s, more than 120 kilometers of lanes had been dedicated to active modes, attracting over 1 million inhabitants every week.

## Ciclovía today: an urban policy based on a recreational event

Today, Ciclovía is managed and organized by the Department of Leisure and Sports of the Bogotá City Hall, and mobilizes a large number of public actors involved in health, events, youth, but also transport and mobility. The city decided to make the most of this dedicated public space to hold recreational and sports activities (gym, theater ...) in order to attract a wider spectrum of participants and foster social cohesion. The event is also an opportunity to provide information and organize awareness-raising events (civic culture, fight against Covid-19, etc.). It has significant political, financial and administrative support and the 1.4 million euros dedicated every year to its organization allow for the necessary logistics to stage it properly: closing off traffic with barriers and signage, having stewards in charge of supervision, information and security, rolling out activities, etc.

## The initiative's impact

The available data and observations made by research teams allow us to identify the event's main effects:

- **Massive and popular participation:** between 2015 and 2021, Ciclovía attracted an average of 1.5 million inhabitants each week, in a city of 7 million. The main modes used by participants are cycling (68%), followed by walking (22%), skateboarding or scootering (10%) and jogging (10%). Participants stay on average 3 hours at Ciclovía .
- **Creating social ties:** the event is intended to be inclusive and popular, open to all areas of the city, including the poorest. The vast majority of participants (92%) in a 2009 survey identified as working class or middle class. Another study carried out in 2013 shows an increase in social capital among Ciclovía participants: greater self-confidence and stronger sense of mutual trust, connection and solidarity among participants.
- **Positive externalities on health:** according to surveys, participants' main motivation is to practice physical exercise to maintain good health. People who take part in Ciclovía are less sedentary than others: indeed, compared to the average person, they will more likely walk for over 2 hours per week. The event is also a way of improving air quality and reducing noise pollution.
- **A symbolic dimension:** the event offers an alternative urban imaginary, showing what a city could look like with more space dedicated to outdoor activities, more breathable air and less motorized traffic. A world-renowned model since the 2000s, Bogota has inspired new discussions since the Covid-19 crisis on the appropriation of public spaces for active modes.

## The conditions for success

- **A fertile ground for a popular cycling culture:** according to the creator of Ciclovía: "Rich or poor, Colombians love cycling, they have their champions, but they also have access to bicycles and know how to repair them." Cycling is indeed the national sport in Colombia, whether among

the working class or the upper classes and political elites. Bicycle shops ("bicicletarias") are present throughout the city.

- **Strong political will:** despite periods of uncertainty, the existence of Ciclovía has never been under threat. The city's different mayors have supported it - more or less strongly - albeit with different goals: recreational policies for the working classes, policies to enhance the attractiveness of public space and the image of the city, or health policies to fight against a sedentary lifestyle.
- **A weekly gathering that builds loyalty:** the event has become a tradition since the 1980s. Residents, and especially families, have become accustomed to going there every Sunday and understand the constraints on car traffic that day. The non-permanent aspect of the event also helps legitimize the traffic restrictions, as they would be harder to accept if they were in place all the time.

## Limits and lessons for future implementations

- **Encouraging cycling as a means of daily transport:** the temporary and recreational nature of the event does not necessarily allow for a change in daily mobility behaviors. According to pro-bike activists, bike paths remain insufficient for regular journeys throughout the rest of the week.
- **Fighting against inequalities and barriers to accessibility:** while inclusivity is one of Ciclovía's priorities, the reality is that only 1/3 of participants are women, and that very few activities are adapted for people with reduced mobility. In addition, over half the participants don't feel safe from the risk of a personal injury.
- **Including citizens in governance and organization:** the event's design, as well as its spatial, temporal and functional conditions are decided by public authorities. True appropriation would require direct involvement from citizens in its implementation.

## Download the complete summary sheet

To find all the information about the history of this initiative, its actions and its results, download the summary sheet produced by the Mobile Lives Forum.

## Bogotá's Ciclovía: an emblematic model of a "car-free Sunday"

### Introduction



On Sundays and public holidays, the city of Bogotá bans motorized traffic on 127 kilometers of roads, and hands them over to active modes. This continuous network throughout the city, supervised by stewards, thus becomes a vast and secure space reclaimed by inhabitants to walk, cycle, skateboard or rollerblade. This event originally emerged out of a citizens' protest that united almost 5000 pro-bicycle activists in December 1974. It is now organized and managed by the city, more specifically since 1995 by its Department of Leisure and Sports (*Instituto Distrital de Recreación y Deporte, IDRD*). Ciclovía has become an unmissable weekly event and is still hugely popular: almost a quarter of the city's population takes part every week.

Since the 2000s, many cities have taken inspiration and tried to replicate its model, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic (New York, Vancouver, Milan...).

**Methodology:** The description and analysis of this initiative is based on data, research articles and documents in English and Spanish available online, as well as interviews with the activist who instigated the movement, Jaime Ortiz Mariño, and with those currently responsible for organizing Ciclovía within the Bogotá City Hall - Monica Duran, Luis Martinez and Daniella Hernandez - in June 2021.

To learn more about the pro-bike movement in Bogota, see the New Voices section (*Mobilithèse*) on [forumviesmobiles.org](http://forumviesmobiles.org)

« [Politique de la convivialité : la mobilité et le droit à la ville dans le militantisme cycliste à Bogota](#) » [[Politics of conviviality: mobility and the right to the city in cycling activism in Bogota](#)], by Paola Castañeda (2017)

### Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

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## Movement

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

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## Lifestyle

A lifestyle is a composition of daily activities and experiences that give sense and meaning to the life of a person or a group in time and space.

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### Associated Thematics :

#### Lifestyles

- Alternative mobilities
- Aspirations
- Living environments
- Leisure & tourism

#### Policies

- Civic Action
- Cycling & Walking
- Cities & Territories

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