



## City profile

## City profile: The Bogotá Metropolitan Area that never was

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## ABSTRACT

Bogotá's urban and regional planning has focused on pressing demographic, economic, and urban development needs that can no longer be administered without a comprehensive understanding of its surrounding region. Population growth in municipalities in the vicinity of Bogotá is twice that of the city, which in some cases has led to a functional integration and conurbation as part of the same territory, despite having different governments and uncoordinated urban development plans. This paper revisits the evolution of the governance and regulatory framework of Bogotá and its surrounding region, as contrasted with the spatial and socioeconomic aspects at the larger metropolitan scale, and analyses its effects on the current configuration of the city-region that we identify as the Bogotá Metropolitan Area. The paper draws conclusions from primary and secondary information, providing insights into the recent and future development of the city and its metropolitan area that is yet to be officially constituted.

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## 1. Introduction

Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, has become a paradigmatic case in the study of urban development in the Global South. This can be attributed to both significant examples of efficient urban management by some previous local administrations (Dávila, 2009, Dávila, Gilbert, Brand, Rueda, & Coupe, 2006), and to innovations in urban infrastructure and services that are regarded internationally as best-practices, such as local Bus Rapid Transit (BRT): Transmilenio (Gilbert, 2008, Hidalgo & Sandoval, 2004).

In a previous city profile, Skinner (2004) provides a comprehensive review of almost fifty years of changes in the physical, social, and governance layout of the city, up to the end of one of the most relevant periods for local urban development: the two governments of Mayor Antanas Mockus and the administration of Mayor Enrique Peñalosa. Today, 14 years after his first period as Bogotá's mayor, Enrique Peñalosa has been re-elected to run a city that has seen many changes in its spatial, functional and institutional dimensions. This is therefore a pertinent time to revisit some of the spatial, economic and social aspects of Bogotá from a broader perspective that incorporates the larger metropolitan scale of the city.

During the last 30 years, the population of Bogotá has almost doubled, while in the city's surrounding areas this growth has been 2.8 times. This paper examines the demographic, economic and spatial dimensions of the recent evolution of what we term the metropolitan

area, paying special attention to the regional dynamics. This growth has occurred despite the lack of a regional authority for urban management. Our data allow us to identify the location of main urban activity centres, tendencies of urban population distributions, and functional interactions of the city-region, reflecting on the implications of the emerging urban form for local urban governance, economic, and social development.

## 2. Governance, demographic growth and geographical features

The current governance structure of Bogotá's metropolitan area (or BMA, as the operative acronym we use in this paper) is partly a consequence of Bogotá's administrative, spatial, urban, and socio-economic structure, which has been consolidated by processes of institutional reforms that had decentralisation and administrative reorganisation at their core. Such processes can be traced back to the mid-20th century.

## 2.1. Milestones in Bogotá's growth in the late 20th century

Initial steps toward the administrative reorganisation of the capital territory were characterised by the adhesion of municipalities adjacent to Bogotá. Such reorganisation deeply influenced not only the urban growth of the city, but also its institutional arrangements for the provision of essential services, such as transport and utilities.

In 1954, during the de-facto military national government of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953–1957), Bogotá experienced the first institutional process of the absorption of neighbouring municipalities, which ultimately became part of the current structure of the city. By presidential decree, six neighbouring municipalities (Usaquén, Suba, Engativá,

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Fontibón, Bosa, and Usme) were annexed to Bogotá city, giving birth to the Special District of Bogotá that later became the modern Capital District (D.C.). This process sought to respond to increasing pressure for more efficient urban management of Bogotá's territory – and its immediate surroundings—due to rapid demographic and physical growth, and to the limited capacity of local governments in these municipalities to provide adequate utilities and essential services (Botero & Suárez, 2010). This first step toward decentralisation permitted a clear definition of an administrative division of the city in zones that preceded the current administrative division. Such zones marked the redefinition of the city's administrative structure, including what until that time had been independent adjacent municipalities.

Dávila (2005) and Botero and Suárez (2010) argued that the reforms that joined together Bogotá's neighbouring municipalities in the mid-1950s were motivated by demographic, political, and administrative concerns related to the definition of a space that could adapt to future pressure for the physical and population growth of the city. This called for a rapid expansion of existing networks of infrastructure and urban services in order to provide connectivity to the new areas and to integrate them into the city's functional and economic structure. Unfortunately, these motivations were not interconnected and this led to fast urban development and pressing demands for the supply of infrastructure, housing and services, without sufficient involvement from the public sector. The new city neglected the need to develop a master plan and ignored regional considerations, despite previous attempts to develop regional master plans for the city. Lack of a long-term planning culture allowed growth decisions to remain in the hands of all sorts of developers, including a large number of emerging informal housing developers. These began to build precarious low cost housing on the peripheries of growing municipalities in the region without connectivity to electricity, water and other utilities, public services or infrastructure (Cortés, 2005). According to Dávila (2005), between the 1950s and the 1990s, the population of Bogotá grew to almost ten times its original size, whereas its built area grew at a somewhat more moderate pace from 4000 ha to 29,000 ha, positioning itself as one of the densest cities in the region. Since the 1950s no further initiatives to incorporate surrounding municipalities into Bogotá or to constitute a unified authority for the metropolitan area have come to fruition.

The evolution of planning in Bogotá and its surrounding region is a reflection of this lack of integrated regional initiatives and governance. Earlier initiatives for coordinating the development of Bogotá included all-encompassing master plans for a controlled growth of the city and its adjacent region. Renowned architect Le Corbusier developed a modernist master plan in 1951 that introduced the idea of a multipolar regional network for Bogotá and some of its surrounding territories. This, however, was not put into practice beyond the pilot phase. In 1961, through the Pilot Road Plan, Bogotá's administration developed the first plan for road infrastructure that built on technical studies and appraisals rooted in planning approaches that had been developed in the US and Europe, known as the Urban Transport Planning Process (Montezuma, 2000). This plan revisited some elements of Le Corbusier's master plan, introducing ring roads and a mixed road network for the city. Some of the most relevant road corridors in the city today are a result of the implementation of this plan, of which 60% was completed. They were one of many attempts to define a ring road that served as an outer boundary for controlling Bogotá's growth. One of the most emphatic recommendations of the plan was the construction of an urban rail system for public transport that supported dense development and improved the connectivity and consolidation of the existing city. However, this was discarded in place of what at the time was perceived as one of the main priorities for urban development: road infrastructure (Montezuma, 2000).

Several main roads were built in the city in the 1960s as part of a modernisation process that involved its adaptation for the era of the car. Later, in 1972, Lauchlin Currie revisited some of the ideas set out in Le Corbusier's plan at the regional scale, introducing in a study

entitled "Phase II", what Acosta (2010) identifies as: "development alternatives and the necessary support networks required to face the demographic explosion expected at the time". Like its predecessor, this plan was not implemented. However, it provided insights for subsequent sectoral agendas. Recent initiatives, reviewed later in this paper, have picked up the need for metropolitan planning for Bogotá and its surrounding municipalities. However, during the last decades of the twentieth century the pressure to address the city's immediate problems led to planning initiatives and projects with an internal and sectoral focus.

In recent years Bogotá's own urban development and governance has been framed by the lack of a metropolitan authority. Despite the significant progress made in relation to modernising Bogotá's government and urban structure during the last decade of the 20th century, and the first of the 2000s (Gilbert, 2008, Hidalgo & Sandoval, 2004), over the last decade the city's administrations have faced different challenges related to mismanagement, corruption, and pressing internal urban needs that have placed regional development in second place. Although during the first part of the 21st century the city witnessed changes in public policies related to civic culture and positive behaviour, large investments in infrastructure and public spaces, as well as progress in social programmes, more recent governments have left the city with considerable challenges in relation to urban transport, land-use planning, and financial management, all of which may impair future initiatives for regional integration.

## 2.2. "Building" an unequal city-region: imbalances at different scales

Recent urban literature argues that Latin American cities, and in particular their metropolitan regions, show an increasing socio-economic mix at the macro level and increasing segregation at the micro level (Janoschka & Borsdorf, 2006, Coy, 2006, Libertun de Duren, 2006). These patterns of segregation can have potential long-term social consequences, particularly in relation to the increase in social and spatial inequalities within urban societies (Libertun de Duren, 2006). Bogotá, like other large metropolises in Latin America, has not been able to contain its growth within its existing boundaries, spilling over into smaller towns and adjoined settlements, while being restricted by its own jurisdiction (Halseth, 2005, Nickson, 1995). Thibert and Osorio (2014) argue that the socio-spatial segregation of Bogotá's metropolitan region not only has immediate social and economic consequences, but will also have long-term political repercussions. These political consequences can be linked to shifts in population belonging both to the economic elites and the poorest residents from the city centre to the peripheries, which may entail shifts in the distribution of power, and so strengthen inequalities in the distribution of public investment, infrastructure, and access to urban facilities and functions.

According to evidence from Watson (2009), class and income inequalities in the cities of Latin America and the Caribbean have deepened the gaps between rich and poor that place cities in these regions among the most unequal in the world. Low and Astle (2009) contend that "the particular capacities and powers of organisations influence transport planning outcomes". The case of the municipalities surrounding Bogotá contrast with others reported in the Latin American scientific literature where large municipalities embedded in prominent metropolises have demonstrated high performance and efficiency in urban planning and management. The shift of investment and speculation toward the peripheries allows both "increased suburban development by the upper and middle classes and more rapid consolidation by the peripheral poor" (Carter, 2003). Transport infrastructure plays an essential role in these trends, both by facilitating the consolidation and homogenisation of the middle classes in suburban communities and allowing the establishments of the poor away from the city centre (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2010).

Hurtado, Henández, and Miranda (2014) argue that the urban management model in Colombia is closely related to the administrative

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