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Reclaiming the streets for people: Insights from Ciclovías Recreativas in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

The Ciclovías comprise worldwide programs in which streets are closed to motor-vehicles and open to individuals for leisure activities. Currently, 93% of the regular programs are in Latin American countries (LAC). The aims of this study were to describe the characteristics of regular Ciclovías in 7 LAC and to analyze the factors that influence the sustainability and scaling-up of five case studies. We conducted a survey of 67 Ciclovías in 2014–2015. In addition, we conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former program coordinators and reviewed policy documents from Ciclovías in 5 LAC. The greatest expansion of Ciclovías has occurred since 2000. The number of participants per event ranged from 40 to 1,500,000 (mean $41,399 \pm 193,330$; median 1600), and the length ranged from 1 to 113.6 km (mean 9.1 ± 16.4 ; median 3). Ciclovía routes connect low-middle and high income neighborhoods (89.3%), and include the participation of minority populations (61.2%). The main complementary activity offered was physical activity (PA) classes (94.0%), and 80.0% of the programs included strategies to promote biking. All five case studies met definitions for sustainability and scaling-up. All programs shared some level of government support, alliances, community appropriation, champions, compatibility with the mission of the host organization, organizational capacity, flexibility, perceived benefits, and funding stability. However, they differed in operational conditions, political favorability, sources of funding, and number of alliances. The Ciclovías of LAC showed heterogeneity within their design and sustainability factors. Both their heterogeneity and flexibility to adjust to changes make them promising examples of socially inclusive programs to promote PA.

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1. Introduction

The worldwide expansion of Ciclovías resembles a healthy epidemic of a promising community intervention that may counter the global pandemic of physical inactivity (Kohl et al., 2012) and obesity (Sarmiento et al., 2010a; GBD 2013 Risk Factors Collaborators et al., 2015). Ciclovías are multi-sectoral programs in which streets are closed to motorized vehicles and open exclusively for individuals to enjoy safe, free spaces for leisure activities (Meisel et al., 2014).

Ciclovía program benefits extend beyond leisure physical activity (PA) promotion by providing a suitable environment to decrease unequal access to recreational opportunities (Teunissen et al., 2015), promote social capital (Torres et al., 2013), improve the population's quality of life (Sarmiento et al., 2010b), advocate for cycling for transport (Torres et al., 2013), reduce particulate pollution and street noise (Sarmiento et al., 2010a; Shu et al., 2015) and increase business activity (Chaudhuri and Zieff, 2015).

For approximately 16 years, we have observed the scaling up of Ciclovías around the world (del Castillo A et al., 2013). Currently, Ciclovías with events at least twice per year are implemented in at least 496 cities in 27 countries on all continents (del Castillo A et al., 2013). These programs occur in a wide variety of cities, from metropolises to relatively small towns. The fastest expansion has occurred in Latin America countries (LAC) which account for 93% of all regular programs. Among these programs, approximately 90% were inaugurated since 2000. The large-scale expansion of Ciclovías represents

Abbreviations: PA, physical activity; CRA, Ciclovías Recreativas of the Americas Network.

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an example of practice-based evidence driving new programs and policy faster than research-based evidence (Sarmiento et al., 2010a).

In this context, studies of regular Ciclovías from LAC with different approaches and trajectories may provide useful insights into why these programs have grown. These findings, in turn, will inform global and country specific efforts, such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation initiative towards the creation of a culture of health (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2013), the World Health Organization Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (Who, 2004), the United Nations political declaration on non-communicable diseases (United Nations, 2011) and the Plan of Action for the Prevention of Obesity in Children and Adolescents from the Pan-American Health Organization (Organización Panamericana de la Salud, 2015).

Therefore, the aims of our study are twofold: 1) to describe the characteristics of regular Ciclovías in 7 LAC, and 2) to analyze the factors that influence the sustainability and scaling-up of five case studies.

2. Methods

This study used a mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design in which quantitative and qualitative methodologies were prioritized equally and were applied concurrently.

2.1. Survey of Ciclovías in Latin America

The survey used the programs registered in the Ciclovías Recreativas of the Americas Network (CRA) as a sampling frame (Ciclovías Recreativas de las Américas, 2015). According to the CRA, 390 programs were registered in April 2014. Of these programs, 374 programs were implemented in 17 LAC (Fig. 1). Program coordinators received an invitation to complete an on-line questionnaire from August 2014 to February 2015 (Appendix A).

The questions included the following dimensions: 1) length and duration, 2) access and attractiveness, 3) social inclusion, 4) users, 5)

services and 6) safety (Appendices A–C). The questions were developed based on expert consultations conducted in 2011 and 2014 (Sarmiento et al., 2013). The experts included program coordinators ($N = 3$), Ciclovía-Recreativa/transport consultants ($N = 5$), one public health practitioner, and one researcher (Sarmiento et al., 2013). Questionnaires were conducted in Spanish.

The programs were classified into 8 typologies based on all combinations of the following 3 factors 1) frequency: weekly vs. monthly/bi-monthly/seasonal, 2) urban scale: city/metropolitan vs. neighborhood/district and 3) length (≤ 10 vs. > 10 km) (Appendix C). We used a chisq-test to assess differences in typologies between programs using SAS version 9.4.

2.2. Qualitative component

From the surveyed programs, we selected four Ciclovía programs using a purposive sampling approach based on the following criteria: trajectories between 5 and 15 years, and different funding and organization schemes (public vs. private partnerships). The programs from Cuautitlán Izcalli and Mexico City (México), Quito (Ecuador), and Santiago de Chile (Chile) were selected. In addition, we included Bogotá's program (Colombia) because it has been the inspirational model for other Ciclovías worldwide (Sarmiento et al., 2010a; Díaz Del Castillo et al., 2011).

We conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former program coordinators based on a guide that focused on origins, structure, policy, funding, regularity, growth, allies, perceived benefits, challenges and citizen participation. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. We also reviewed available reports and policy documents from these programs.

We defined sustainability as a dynamic set of processes that enable the continued delivery of program activities and policies in an identifiable form even if modified or adapted (Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone, 1998; Scheirer and Dearing, 2011). Ciclovías were considered sustained

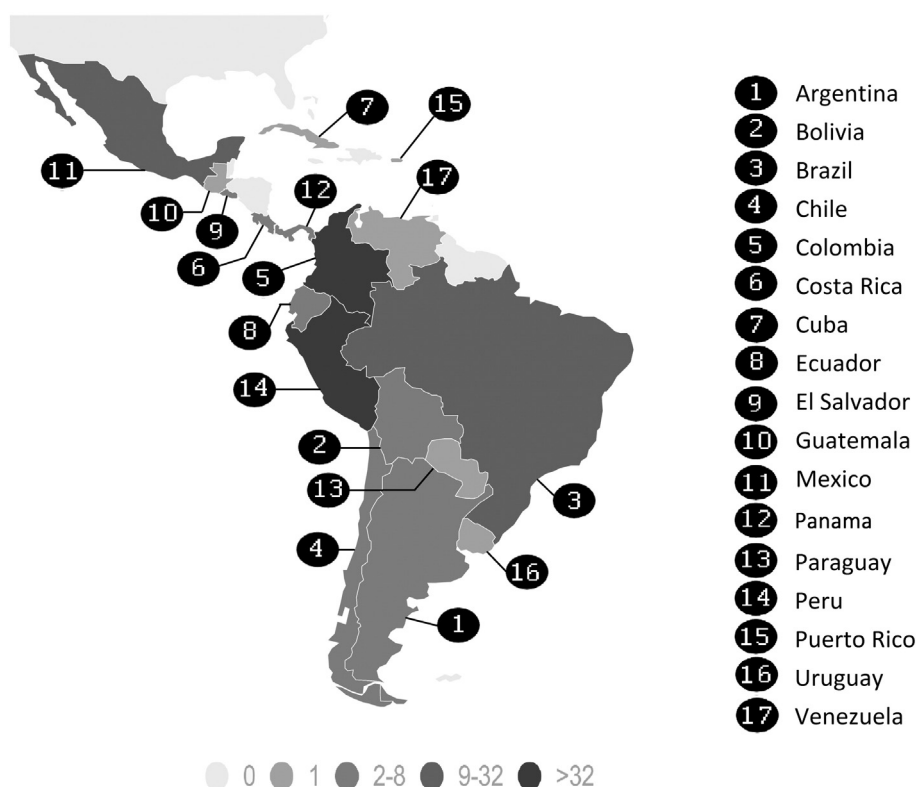


Fig. 1. Countries with Ciclovía programs in Latin America during the period of 1974–2016. The gray scale corresponds to the number of programs per country. Only programs that occur at least two times per year are included.

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