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Informal Settlements in a medium Latin American city: a proposal in the sixth district of Ibagué. (Colombia).

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Abstract.

Rapid urban growth has caused, among other things, the increase in number of informal settlements in Latin American peripheries. In many cases, an increasing inequality results in socioeconomic residential segregation, generating gaps among the different groups of a community. This phenomenon is expanding in Latin America.

In cities of considerable size, experiences from some integration and careful interventions with the existing urban structure – neighbourhood improvement plans – are mostly enriching. The Favela Bairro - Rio de Janeiro programme, the PUI - Medellin, the MIB - Bogota or Chile Barrio have had enough budget and financing possibilities. However, what kind of strategies should be used in intermediate increasing cities, with low financing possibilities and limited budget?

This paper presents a research in progress which analyzes the development of these processes in the intermediate city of Ibagué, Colombia. It tries to find some applicable strategies derived from a University Cooperation Project. The research establishes an approach to the aspects that contribute towards the formation of informal settlements and its possible links to socioeconomic residential segregation. It also studies, by using "Las Delicias" neighbourhood as reference, the development of slum areas in Ibagué.

Based on a University Cooperation Project, the research concludes proposing a neighbourhood improvement plan for integration of those slum areas. These strategies involve the community and their organizations, the local administration –the city council – and inter-university cooperation².

KEYWORDS: INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS, URBAN INTEGRATION, IBAGUÉ, COOPERATION PROJECT.

1. Rapid urban growth in Latin American cities.

The significant migration processes have contributed to rapid urban growth and the creation of huge informal settlements in Latin American cities. Since the middle of 20th Century¹, the panorama of increasing opportunities in urban centres and the improvement in quality of life had the effect of expanding and increasing slum areas.

Although, this growth have had different rhythms in each Latin American country (see figure 1), exist a common urban explosion and a characteristic urban supremacy. According to Clichevsky (2003), large cities as México D.F, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Lima, Quito and Caracas have high levels of informality –more than 40%-. These cities have been prime destiny centres for rural migration.



Figure 1. Rhythms of urbanization and large cities in Latin America. Source: own elaboration with data of Barcena (2000).

Latin American country-city migrations are a consequence of some global and economic changes. The 70`s debt crisis, the Second World War and some policies of the World Bank with the International Monetary Fund,² contributed to importation of goods and to agricultural modernization³.

However, one of the most important factors for these rural migrations and the growth of informal settlements, were civil strife and repression.⁴ This is a usual situation in Colombia⁵, where the armed conflict generates forced displacements of peasant and indigenous population towards informal settlements in large and medium cities. The figure 2 shows the receiver and expulsion areas in Colombia, and how some cities are the focuses of these migrations. Large built-up urban areas as, Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and

¹ It was through the 20th Century that Latin-America began to develop the processes of rapid urban growth.

² Stiglitz, 2007.

³ For more information see: Jaramillo, 2003; Portes and Robert, 2005.

⁴ Davis, 2007.

⁵ FARC and ELN are two guerrilla groups with presence in Colombia.

Barranquilla; and middle cities as, Popayán, Cucuta, Santa Marta and Ibagué have received part of this forced displaced rural population.

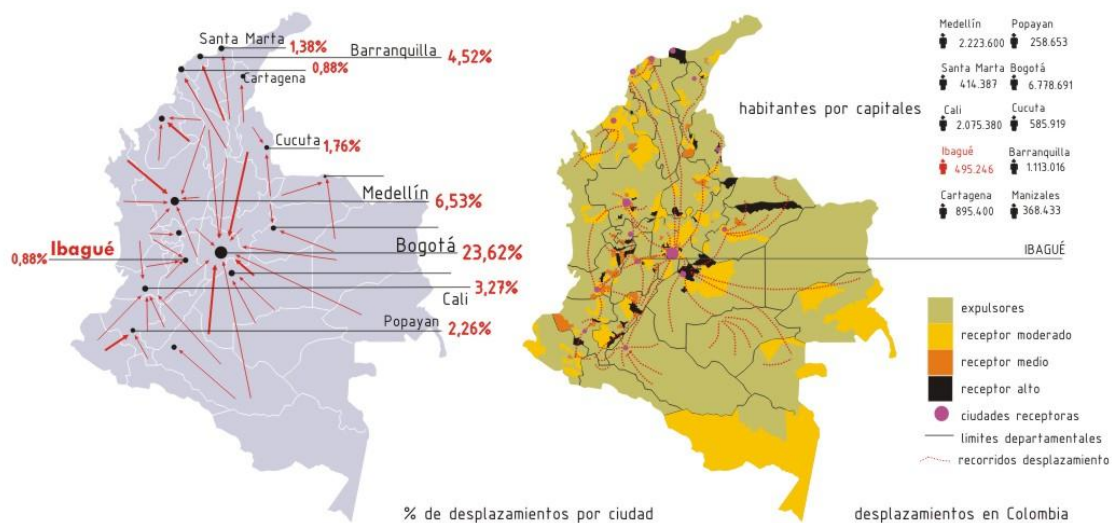


Figure 2. Displacements of population by areas and cities in Colombia. Source: own elaboration based on CODHES (2000) cartography.

In some of informal settlements in these cities, there is a lack of infrastructure, public services and a high risk of landslide and flooding. This situation facilitates a socio-economic residential segregation, because these areas are usually not taking in consideration by municipal administration.

This socio-economic residential segregation is produced, in part, by a concentration of urban population in spaces of a socially homogeneous composition. According to Katzman (2003), the population is located in different areas, disconnected from other socio-economic urban classes, and this isolation causes an educational and services segregation and a big fracture in employment opportunities.

Rather than trying to seek a solution to this segregation, society holds a contemptuous attitude. The rise of criminality and illegal attitudes in some of these settlements generates increased fear, which is made manifest in protected gated communities. However, this informality is constructed by people whose priority is survival through solidarity networks and collective commitment. These settlements have a peculiar aesthetic and culture, which must be considered.⁶

2. Learning about policies and Neighbourhood Improvement Programmes.

Policies regarding informal settlements have been similar in Latin American urban context. The different implemented solutions can be simplified in three different periods:

⁶ Bereinstein, 2001.

The first type of intervention consisted in a large process of eradication and relocalization.⁷ Large population was pushed to the outskirts of the city in areas where social complexes were being constructed. The informal settlements were seen as an urban cancer or a focus of epidemics and urban crisis.⁸

Some of the most important eradication interventions (see figure 3) were made in the favelas of Río de Janeiro (the worst period was between 1968 and 1975)⁹, in the *Villas Miseria* of Buenos Aires (were large implemented with PEVE¹⁰ in 1966 and after military dictatorship) and in the *Barrios* of Caracas between 1952 and 1957 with the dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez.¹¹

According to Conde, L; Magalhaes, S. (2004), this strategy of removal and relocation, has caused many negative societal consequences and had social and personal cost. Many families lost their existing social networks and the proximity to work. These policies were unfortunately, replicated in different cities throughout Latin America.



Figure 3. Social complexes established in eradication interventions. Río de Janeiro, Caracas and Buenos Aires. Source: Own elaboration based on images from web, Magalhaes (2007) and Sárraga (2008).

The second type of intervention was regularization and promoted settlement consolidation (*radicación in situ*). The governments had self-help housing projects and small local upgrading programs. Although these interventions

⁷ For more information see: UN, 2003; Buenos Aires: Cravino, 2009; Río de Janeiro: Conde and Cavallieri, 2004; Caracas: Rivas, 2007 and Bolivar, 1998.

⁸ According to Conde; Magalhaes (2004), Alfred Agache, the architect of the Rio planning in 1927, used to state that favelas were the leprosy of the city.

⁹ 30% of the population in favelas was evicted.

¹⁰ PEVE: eradication of "villas de emergencia". See more: Oliveira, 2008.

¹¹ Rivas, 2007.

were more respectful with the community and their social structure, they were quite punctual and could not be part of an integral plan for the cities.

In 1990's appeared more comprehensive and respectful interventions that integrated these settlements with the urban structure: the neighbourhood improvement programmes. These programs, besides to provide infrastructures and services, are usually focused on social field. Promoting the formation of associations and labour training, they support the community empowerment and job creation.¹²

These programs are usually financed by BID¹³ and have been established in several Latin-American countries. Among them: Colombia with *Proyecto Sur con Bogotá* (South Project with Bogotá)¹⁴, *PUI* (Urban integral projects) in Medellín¹⁵ and Brazil through *Favela-Bairro Program* in Rio de Janeiro¹⁶, Chile with *Chile Barrio* and Venezuela through *Programa de Habilitación de Barrios* (Program of Neighbourhood Physical Rehabilitation)¹⁷, etc...

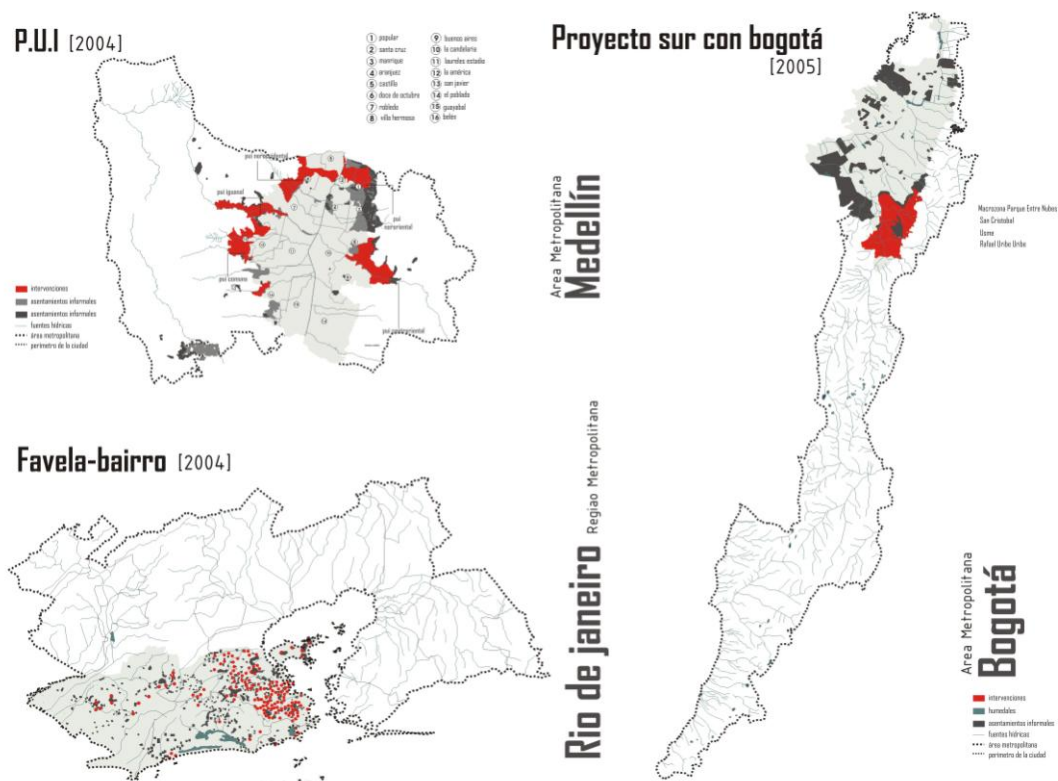


Figure 4. Neighbourhood improvement programs in Rio de Janeiro, Medellín and Bogotá. Source: own elaboration with data On Line (Edu and Prefeitura de Rio).

¹² See: Brakarz, 2002.

¹³ Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (Inter-American Bank of Development).

¹⁴ It was developed with the co-operation between the governments of Germany and Colombia 1999 -2006.

¹⁵ This program is a part of the strategy for neighbourhood improvement in Medellín 2004.

¹⁶ It has often been considered as a paradigm of neighbourhood improvement in Latin America 1993.

¹⁷ It succeeded in approaching improvement through a more open vision involving the community, the government and academia. Venezuela: 1999 - 2005.

Many of these programs have given us lessons in how to design integration strategies. For example: the importance of regularization that becomes a civic duty after program interventions. Is important to extend and relax the period of time between interventions to obtain the strengthening of improvement processes¹⁸ and promote the community empowerment to manage their own development.¹⁹

These enriching experiences have been frequently established in large cities and currently, informal settlements are increasing in middle sized Latin American cities too. Therefore, what happen with these medium-sized cities which have become important attraction centres? Could it be possible to implement alternative strategies in these cities, based on neighbourhood improvement programs? How to solve their financing possibilities and limited sources?

3. Informal Settlements in Ibagué and Las Delicias area –Sixth District.

The city of Ibagué, Colombia, is capital of the Tolima department and has approximately 500,000 inhabitants.²⁰ Ibagué is a medium-sized city bounded on the south by the Combeima River, on the north by the Tutelares hills and on the west by an agricultural plain.

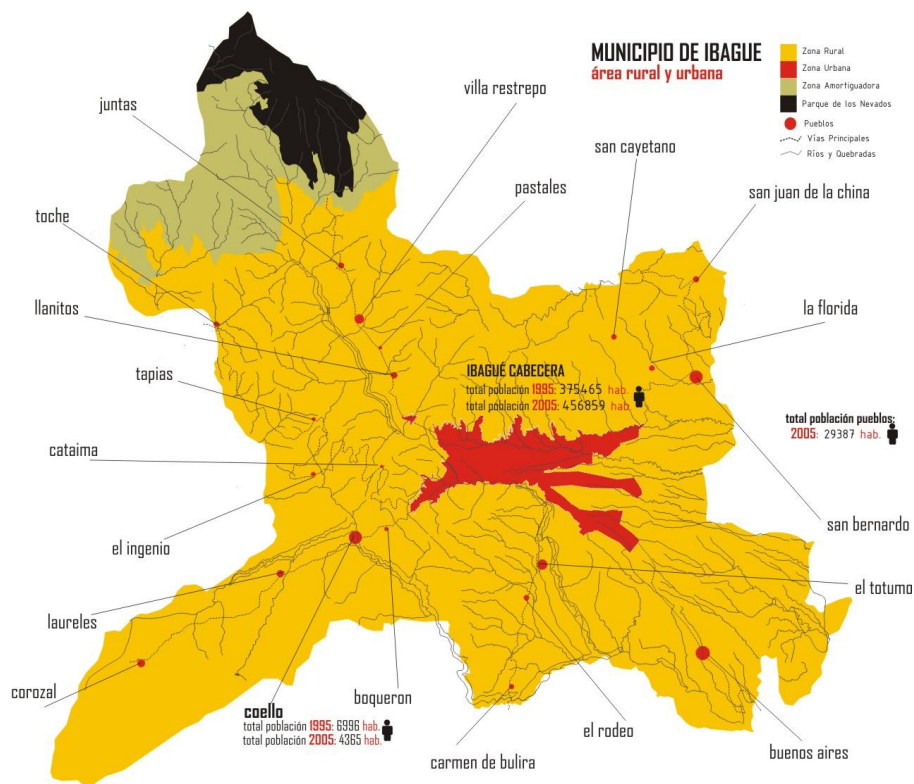


Figure 5. Location, rural and urban area of Ibagué. Source: Own elaboration based on Alcaldía de Ibagué (2008).

¹⁸ UNAL, 2009.

¹⁹ Torres, 2009.

²⁰ DANE: National Department of Statistics, Colombia – 2005.

Urban growth of Ibagué started around the main square in 1551. It was an agricultural town connected with the capital by the most important road in the country: Panamericana Avenue. Its growth was constrained by the hills and the river. Therefore, it has a lineal growth and its housing expansion areas are located on the west.

The city is surrounded by a rural area with tiny towns interconnected by narrow roads. A part of this rural area is an important environmental and protected zone with rivers and streams sources. But the most important natural preserve is the snow-capped mountain park on the northwest.

Ibagué showed its first informal growths in the peripheries caused by the migratory processes from rural violence, between 1940 and 1950. According to Neira (1995), the violence in Tolima obtained the first place in mortality nationwide. The peasant population began to invade urban areas, supported by politicians, labour unions and some associations.²¹

The city government attempted to solve the problem with the division of urban land without public services. However, this decision aggravated the uncontrolled growth of the peripheral areas. Some of these settlements were located on the banks of the Combeima River and Chipalo River and in the Tutelares Hills.

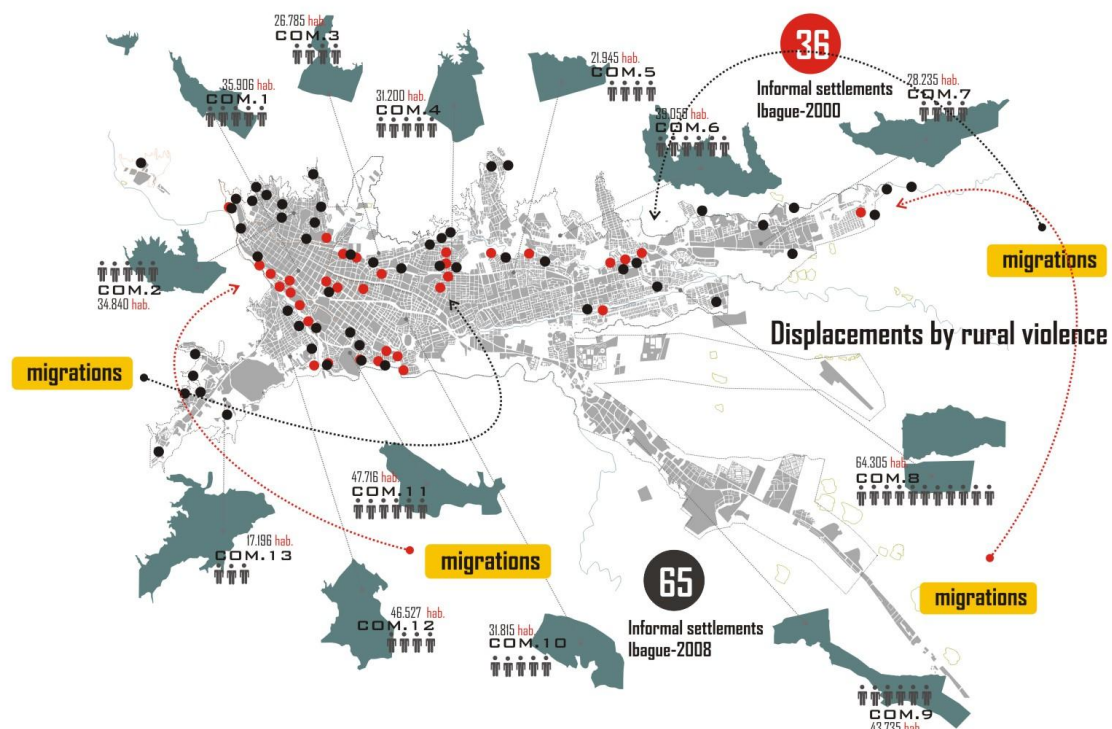


Figure 6. Informal settlements in 2000 and 2008. Districts of Ibagué. Source: Own elaboration with data of Alcaldía de Ibagué (2000 and 2008)

Figure 6 shows how the informal settlements increased between 2000 and 2008. The data from the year 2000 indicated 36 informal settlements and in 2008 there were 65. These new migrations and the increase in informality

²¹ Gutierrez, 2003.

were created by the upsurge in violence in rural areas. The same figure shows the different districts of the city and its inhabitants.

According to official data²², Ibagué had received approximately 51.682 victims of forced displacement in 2010 and urban population with unsatisfied basic needs reached 130.336 people, of which 7% were in poverty.²³ But the situation was made even worse, as the unemployment rate in the city was the highest in the country for a decade.²⁴

The city has a lot of housing problems and the government has attempted to find solutions with some programmes for short-term fixes. However, this is insufficient because the quantitative deficit in housing was 27,000 units in 2008.²⁵

Furthermore, Land Use Planning of Ibagué²⁶ has no particular neighbourhood improvement planning for the city. Although the Ministry of Housing, states that there are an improvement pilot scheme for two neighbourhoods in the city, there is no advanced projects about it.

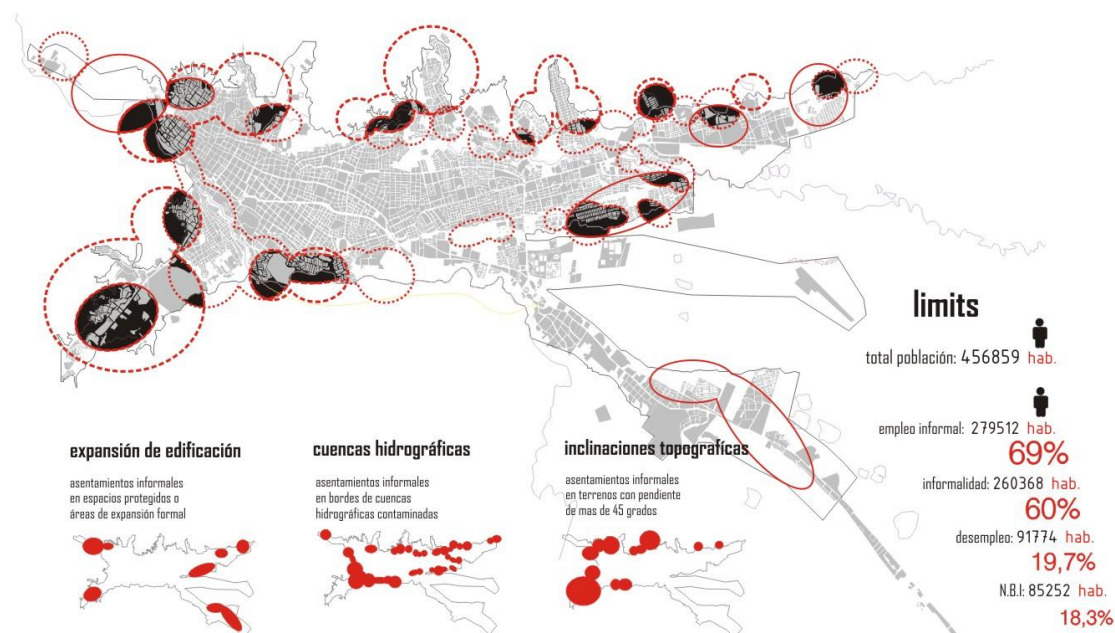


Figure 7. Analysis of expansion areas, streams, rivers, topography and their relationship with the presence of informal settlements in the city. Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 7 shows a land analysis of expansion areas, streams, rivers, topography and their relationship with the presence of informal settlements in the city. These factors have an influence in the location of slums, because the banks of rivers or very steep slopes are rejected by the formal land market.

²² Unique Register for Displaced Population. Data provided by Acción Social (Social Action).

²³ Alcaldía de Ibagué et al, 2008c.

²⁴ Data from DANE on indicators of the labour market 2001-2008.

²⁵ Alcaldía de Ibagué et al, 2008c.

²⁶ Alcaldía de Ibagué et al, 2008b.

Furthermore, gated communities have increased in recent years while public housing with 22.5 m² is located in remote urban expansion areas.²⁷ This is an inadequate space for public housing in a city²⁸ where the low income population usually has large families and develops their work at home.

3.1. Sixth district and the case study

Las Delicias I and II is a peripheral area on the north of Ibagué, whose population is characterized by the large numbers of inhabitants displaced by rural violence.²⁹ The neighbourhood, located on Tutelares hills, is a part of the sixth district and has approximately 2,800 inhabitants

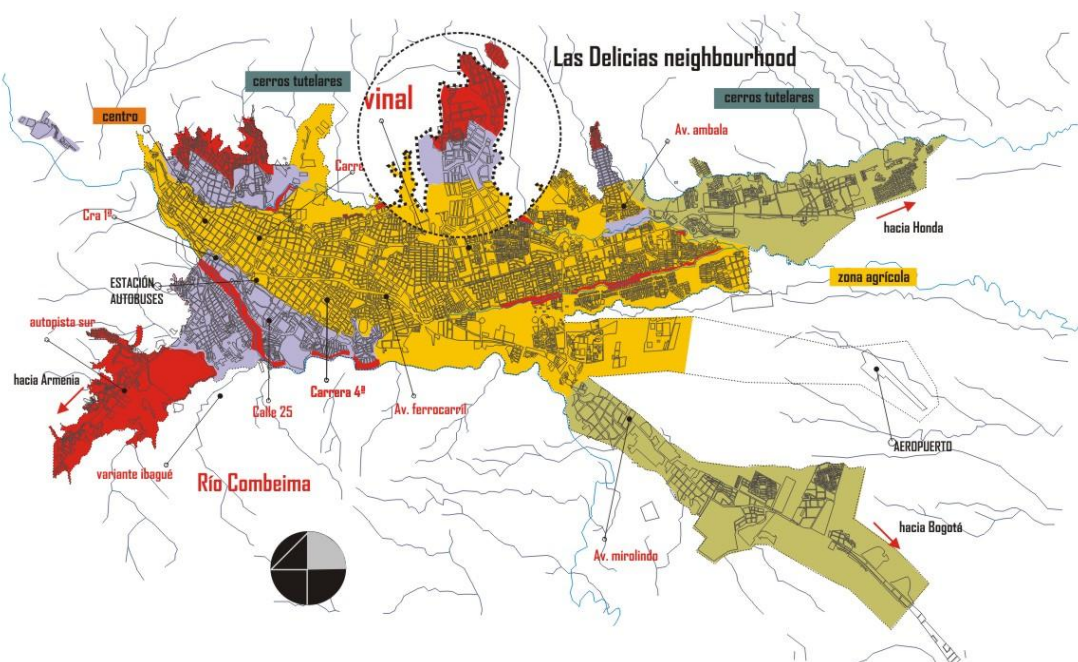


Figure 8. Location of the sixth district and Las Delicias. Source: Own elaboration.

According to an urban and public service analysis of the city, the neighbourhood is a part of a zone with a lack of urban equipment, transport, infrastructure and services. However, is located near a popular zone in consolidation progress, where important educational and commercial activities are developed (see figure 9).

The Neighbourhood presents socio-economic deficiencies and environmental degradation. These problems are caused by the pollution of La Balsa stream, the construction of dwellings in high-risks areas and the use of public spaces for illicit activities.

The arrivals of forced displacement population produce a fracture in the social fabric and disturb the community sense. However, the solution is not to take measures that stop the enjoyment of urban spaces.

²⁷ DANE 2008.

²⁸ DANE 2005 census.

²⁹ Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos IIDH (Interamerican institution of Human Rights)

This idea comes from Social Foundation³⁰, provincial government and the University of Ibagué. During 2004, the community, the municipality, university of Tolima and the School of Architecture collaborated in a participative plan for the Sixth District and made some general assessments.³¹

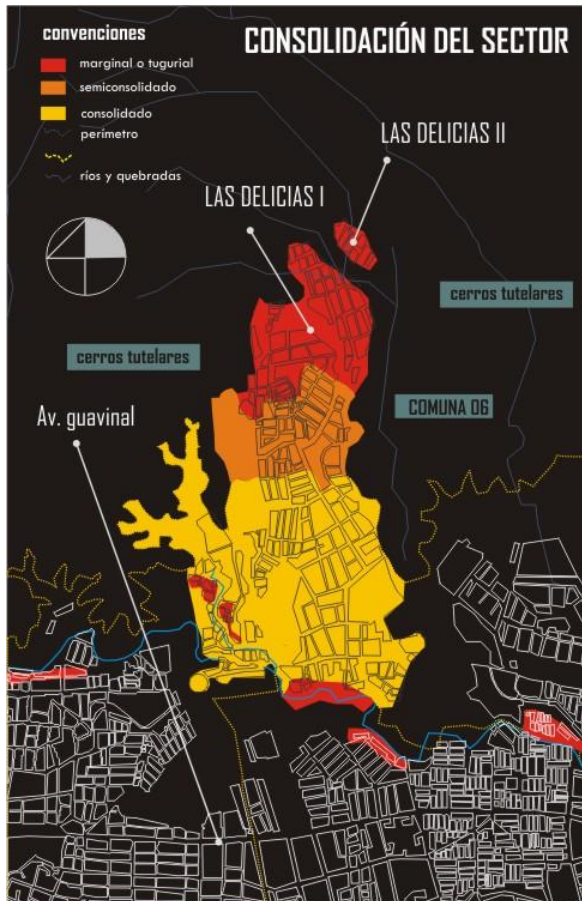


Figure 9. consolidation levels based on public and urban services analysis. Las Delicias and Sixth district. Source: Own elaboration.

The students determined the reasons which caused the rootless attitudes in Las Delicias. For example: lack of identity, ignorance of urban and environmental surroundings, low participation in their neighbourhood planning and precarious urban integration.

A Cooperation and institutional Project for Las Delicias and Ibagué

A University Cooperation Project was suggested between the University of Granada, the University of Ibagué and the National University of Colombia. The goal of the project is to improve the urban and environmental conditions with the interaction between academy-community and the participation of Municipal Planning.

³⁰ Social Foundation is a Colombian non-profit organization who undertakes interventions and social projects in low income sectors.

³¹ In PP6 a broad diagnostic on the quality of life for the population was made.

The project is initially based on a diagnosis made in 2004 and suggests a series of activities in the neighbourhood. These activities are the result of a Neighbourhood's needs assessment.³²The objective is to design and implement small low-cost interventions that can generate a chain of improvement processes over time.

To achieve sustainability, the idea is to design a Neighbourhood Improvement Plan in conjunction with the community. All the interventions would involve its inhabitants and their wishes to get ahead, because the main objective is to implement changes gradually in cooperation with them.

The project is to be developed according to the logical framework approach.³³ All the activities are programmed and inserted in a planning matrix. The indicators, means of verification and assumptions of each item are analysed and the schedule and the cooperative project budget is programmed.

This budget has a breakdown of expenditures and a justification of every item. The project duration with international support is one year but it could be extended for two years, and the highest CICODE's subsidy is 20,000 Euros per year.

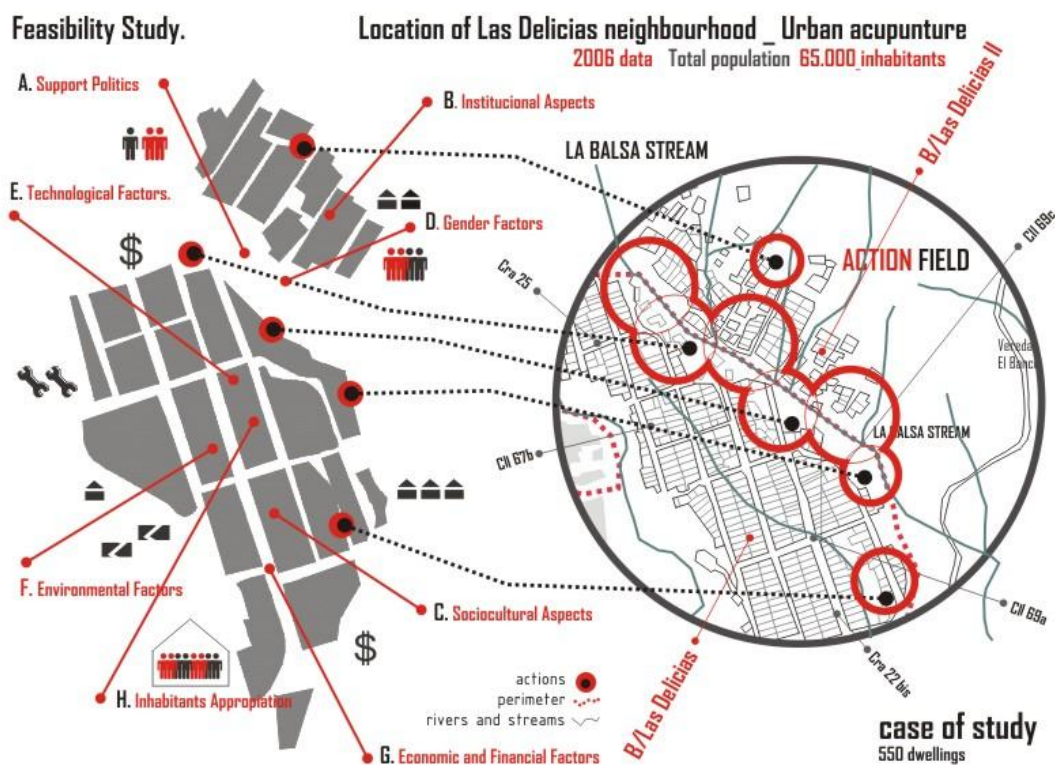


Figure 10. Feasibility factors of the project. Source: Own elaboration.

³² Camacho; et al, 2001.

³³ Ibídem.

Feasibility factors are: political support, institutional aspects, socio-cultural aspects, gender focus, technological factors, environmental factors, economic and financial factors and inhabitant suitability. Furthermore, the interventions will be distributed throughout the territory like a kind of "urban acupuncture". A group of sustainable activities that are necessary to revitalize, cure and create positive actions in the area.³⁴

This proposal takes advantage of the possible "share of knowledge" of the different universities and their research groups. It also involves the human resources of the University of Ibagué and the support of the Municipal Planning Office.

This experience has the potential to be replicated in other middle-sized cities, with the establishment of a mediator organization able to coordinate the available institutional skills, and to create a link between municipal administration and the community.

However, it is very important to keep in mind that the sustainability and the efficiency of these strategies, depend on their integration in urban land planning and policies. This project would be possible, if the municipal administration accepts that the construction and production of the city should be more democratic and participative.

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³⁴ Lerner, 2005.

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