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## Limits and Possibilities of Mixing Policies: Lessons from and for Latin American cities.

by **María José Álvarez Rivadulla**

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### RÉSUMÉ

Plusieurs villes d'Amérique latine essayent de surmonter des décennies de ségrégation (d'état et de marché), en mettant en place des politiques urbaines de mixité qui consistent à localiser des logements sociaux dans des quartiers aisés plutôt que dans les périphéries pauvres où ils étaient traditionnellement construits. Ce changement découle de la prise de conscience des effets négatifs que peut entraîner la vie dans des logements sociaux discriminés et au sein de quartiers pauvres, en général, sans aucune mixité sociale, qui ont été notamment documentés en Amérique latine ainsi que dans d'autres localisations. Bogotá en est un exemple. Les villes européennes et américaines ont, quant à elles, expérimenté la mise en place des diverses politiques de revenus mixtes depuis les années 1990 afin d'enrayer la situation. Que pouvons-nous apprendre de leur expérience? Et, à leur tour, comment les villes latino-américaines peuvent-elles contribuer à la littérature sur la mixité urbaine et l'intégration?

### ABSTRACT

Some Latin American cities are trying to overcome decades of market and state led segregation through mixing urban policies, which consist of locating social housing in better off neighborhoods rather than in the poor peripheries where it was traditionally built. This change comes from the realization of the negative effects of living in segregated public housing and homogeneously poor neighborhoods in general which have been documented in Latin America as well as elsewhere. Bogotá is one of these cases. European and American cities have experimented with different variations of mixed income policies since the 1990s. What can we learn from their experience? And, in turn, what can Latin American cities contribute to the literature on urban mixing and integration?

### Introduction

High levels of class residential segregation characterize Latin American cities (Sabatini, 1999). Although not as an exact mirror, the traditional high levels of income inequality of the region do have visible spatial expressions. There are, however, interesting cases of extreme mixing such as the Rio favelas in the middle of the city and next to very affluent neighborhoods. There are also some new trends that could be countering those high levels of residential segregation, although not without great tensions. Exclusive gated communities have mushroomed in peripheral areas that used to be inhabited only by squatter settlements or poor peasants. Urban renewal projects in city centers and other decayed urban surroundings have also brought together upper classes with original impoverished or poor dwellers. More recently, some countries and particular cities of the region are starting to rethink their social housing policies, acknowledging a sad history of state-led segregation by locating big and homogeneous projects in isolated and already poor peripheral areas. The idea of mixed neighborhoods' policies is starting to appear in the urban plans of different Latin American cities.

Mixing policies have a much longer history in the First World<sup>[1]</sup>. Several European and US cities have engaged in mixed neighborhood policies trying to counter the unequivocal negative effects of concentrated poverty. Unfortunately, results about their implementation are also mixed. As new comers in these urban and social policies, Latin American policy

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*\*\* L'auteur adhère à la charte de déontologie du LIEPP disponible en ligne et n'a déclaré aucun conflit d'intérêt potentiel.*

[1] Although, to be fair, there are antecedents in Latin America as well. One of those is the case of Villa San Luis, in the affluent Santiago's neighborhood of Las Condes, created under the Allende government and currently disappearing. See: <http://www.theclinic.cl/2014/05/19/villa-san-luis-la-caida-del-ultimo-bastion-de-allende-en-las-condes/>.

makers should be aware of those results rather than copy unreflectingly what seems to be a good idea. The reader should note that this work does not acknowledge research on policies currently being implemented and debated in France.

### Mixing Policies in Latin America. The case of Bogotá

Different Latin American cities have recently been designing and trying to implement mixing policies. Experiences are too recent to evaluate their impact on residents, but interesting problems in policy implementation are already worth of attention. Neighbors' opposing projects, social housing excessively high prices, lack of available land in central areas and problems in the timing and other implementation details are some of the complications undermining mixed neighborhoods initiatives.

The idea of mixing comes from officials and governments' realization of urban segregation as a problem and the traditional role of the state contributing to it, by locating social housing in peripheral, isolated and ill-served areas. An example of this is the new Chilean National Urban Development Policy document, which in its opening statement by the Ministry of Housing says:

Urbanization has enabled that our citizens can access the benefits of cities such as interaction with others, labor opportunities, access to services and equipment and the enjoyment of public spaces. At the same time, however, the development of our cities and towns has not been free of problems. The biggest of all being urban social segregation, provoked by decades of advancing in diminishing the housing deficit focusing only on its quantitative aspects, without paying attention to location and access to minimum public goods (Mackenna 2014:9).

In Bogotá, in turn, the last Mayor Gustavo Petro made fighting against this city's inequality and segregation a crucial part of his mandate. The Development Plan for the city 2012-2016, dubbed Human Bogotá, had "fighting segregation" as the first of the three guiding principles (the others being adapting the city to climate change and protection of public goods) (de Bogotá, Consejo 2012).

Bogotá, capital of one of the most unequal countries of the most unequal region in the world is indeed a segregated city. A richer North and a poorer and less served South are clearly identifiable. Yet, the city's riotous growth since the mid twentieth century has enabled residential, if not social, spaces of encounter (the newest and western part of the city is more mixed, the green northern mountains where the most affluent buildings of the city are located are sometimes side by side with land invasions in danger of removal or gentrification, etc.) (Álvarez-Rivadulla & Aliaga-Linares, 2010; Dureau, 2007).

The Mayor's initiative encountered great opposition. This was especially true regarding three projects of free social housing for the extremely poor and displaced that were to be built in seven current parking lots in some of the most affluent areas of the city. Neighbors' comments ranged from political correctness to overt opposition. While some said: "I don't know how displaced people will afford to live in such an expensive place" (El\_Tiempo, 2014), others showed concern about insecurity and the lack of culture for class integration:

Trying to integrate socioeconomic strata in common spaces is not a viable solution from any point of view. The only thing it'll generate is a spike in insecurity, because the poor will try by all means to steal from the rich and it will not be enough police to control this. If insecurity is already a problem, it will be worst then. Besides, we are not as civilized as in Europe. I don't despise our idiosyncrasy but we are not ready for such an ambitious experiment. Maybe in the future, but not now.[2]

In an editorial, the Weekly Semana warned that these projects would not diminish inequality and that they were against the patrimony of all bogotanos. The polemic ended in the courts. Neighbors, supported by a councilman from an opposing party, filed a suit against the measure and they won. Their main argument was that building there rather than elsewhere was too expensive for the State. A few months they knocked another of these projects, this time in a very busy commercial area of the city (Télez-Oliveros, 2015).

Currently, another mayor has taken over and according to its plans and early decisions, these projects are not a priority. Quite the contrary, Peñalosa –who has already been a mayor of Bogotá– is known for building social housing in the peripheral areas of the city and not a fan of densification or mixing. Yet, one project did resist



Plaza La Hoja Project the day the art collective Boa Mistura, from Spain, was intervening the space with a huge colorful mural on the floor that reads "Vida" (life). Picture taken from: <http://www.catalogodiseno.com/2015/10/07/plaza-de-la-hoja-bogota/>

[2] From reader's comments to El Tiempo. 2014. "Ideas para que gente de distintos ingresos conviva en un mismo espacio." El Tiempo, 11/11/2014. Accessed 28/11/2016. <http://app.eltiempo.com/bogota/ideas-para-que-gente-de-distintos-ingresos-conviva-en-un-mismo-espacio/14816661>.

the controversy and was inaugurated in early 2014. Located in a central area, Plaza La Hoja (see picture below) occupies an entire block and houses 457 poor families, victims of displacement either by the armed conflict or natural disasters.

The future of La Hoja is unknown and it offers a fabulous opportunity to learn from it. How will all these families coming from different regions of the country coexist? Will they find jobs? How will they relate to their surroundings, where primarily lower middle class neighbors also expressed concern about their coming? Is this location better than if they had been located in peripheral areas where most social housing is located? How will the subjective belonging to the city of its inhabitants be affected by this location?

Research and time are needed to answer these questions. Yet, studies elsewhere can give us some hints.

### Mixing Policies in Europe & the US

Different mixing programs have been implemented in the US, The Netherlands, France, Finland, the UK, Germany and Sweden since the mid-1990s. They vary depending on many factors, including traditions of welfare state and previous patterns of segregation. Some have tried to attract more affluent residents to move or stay at relatively deprived places and some have attempted to disperse poor enclaves, including those created by previous public housing policy.

In the US, Hope VI and Moving to Opportunity have been two different programs with the same goal: dispersing concentrated poverty particularly that of the “projects”, public housing built in the 1960s as enormous buildings in major American cities, through rental vouchers. The effect of these policies are object of huge debate in the US. Some criticize the self-selection of participants as overstating neighborhood effects. Others focus at the fact that half of those receiving the vouchers move back to high poverty areas within two years (Comey, de Souza Briggs & Weismann 2008).

Goetz, one of the sharpest critics of Hope IV, argues that the policy is regressive. He says that, using a racist discourse of disaster regarding projects as sick communities full of social problems, it underestimated the social capital existent in the demolished projects and overestimated the capacity of individuals to gain from their new environments without the informal networks they had before (Goetz, 2010; 2013). An interesting finding here is that people do value those informal networks a lot and thus most of them move close to where they use to live (Goetz, 2010). Moving to Opportunity, whose experimental design sparked a great amount of enthusiastic yet discouraging research has in turn recently brought better news. While previous

research had detected no or meager positive effects for those that moved from homogeneously poor projects to more heterogeneous neighborhoods, recent more long term data is throwing much better outcomes. According to Chetty, Hendren and Katz (2015), there are positive effects on economic earnings and other outcomes on children and those improve linearly in proportion to the time they spend growing up in that area. So the younger they moved to a better neighborhood, the better they do in adult life.

The Netherlands, with a much more generous welfare model than the US, has often been seen as a model of integration through housing. There, about half of the housing stock in major cities is social housing for rent and the buildings are located everywhere in the city, creating an urban environment in which neighborhoods are naturally mixed and social housing is not very stigmatized. Also, in newly constructed urban areas, 30% of the housing has to be social housing, which assures a certain degree of mix even in new additions to the city.<sup>[3]</sup> Yet, cracks are showing into the system with the privatization and residualization of social housing that has been a trend all over Europe, starting in Britain in the 1980s (Aalbers & Holm, 2008; Musterd 2014), leading to increasingly long waiting lists and higher renting prices in a context of increasing inequality. Within the social rental sector there is considerable competition for housing in the best neighborhoods and more peripheral neighborhoods with high shares of social housing are becoming more marginalized. The solution has been to demolish social housing and bring in private rental and owner occupied housing. Results of such deliberate and invasive mixing interventions, even in the Netherlands, are mixed, but there is no consistent longitudinal experimental study like the one Moving to Opportunity offers.

From these and other multiple interesting studies (this is a very prolific field) we learn that residential social mixing does not guarantee positive social interactions. They may rather cause evasiveness or exclusionary practices. Positive social interactions are more likely when a) social distances in terms of ethnicity, income and other more neglected variables such as life course are not high, b) when projects are small scale, c) when architecture does not differentiate types of tenants, d) when there are common areas that facilitate encounters and e) when the design guarantees a certain degree of privacy within proximity. Two recent interesting studies at both sides of the Atlantic have thrown light on smaller mechanisms that may be key for the success on the implementation of mixed income projects. For both, the devil is in the detail. Tersteeg and Pinkster (2015) analyze a mixed-tenure housing project in Amsterdam whose small scale (110

[3] I thank Fenne Pinkster for this information as well as for great comments to a previous version of this policy brief.



dwellings), availability of common areas, homogenous design and relatively low income differences would predict success in social mixing. Yet, residents report negative encounters. Ethnic prejudices and social distances are high and the authors based them on specific design details of the building (e.g., lack of privacy or bad noise control in the playground) and management practices (e.g. asymmetry in decision making between owners and renters). Massey et al. (2013) also highlight the role of (a heavy hand and every day present) management in the success of a small project (140 units) in the middle of a very white affluent neighborhood in New Jersey. This increases formal and informal social control in the area and guarantees no “unwanted” behaviors (evictions are used as an enforcement mechanism). They also point at the careful selection of residents as one of the reasons for the success of this mixing project. Although coming from deprived families, no resident with criminal records was accepted. Despite high social distances in class and race with the surrounding areas, the aesthetic consistency of the project with local architecture seems to be working towards integration or, at least, no rejection.

## Concluding Remarks and Research Agenda

So, what can we, in Bogotá and in other Latin American cities, learn from these experiences? The first lesson, is that mixing is not a panacea. That you cannot eradicate structural problems such as those originated in the labor market or in the civil war as in Colombia only with urban policies. That there are other tools needed, starting by income redistribution. Yet, urban mixing, can be a good practice under certain conditions. Mixing seems to bring better results if residents are young (effects are greater on children), projects are small, social distances and architectural/spatial differences within the project and with the surroundings are not enormous, social control is present, and if shared spaces that foster interaction are available.

And, what can we teach to the literature from our cities? This less often asked question is crucial given that, I believe, Latin American cities offer great windows to the literature on mixing. On the one hand, there are a lot of policy experiments we should be paying close attention to. We should, for instance, be comparing longitudinally cases such as La Hoja and other projects with similar beneficiaries that were located in much less connected and served areas of the city. What difference place makes, if any? On the other hand, as stated before, cities like Bogotá offer non-policy mixed neighborhoods experiences worth looking at. We know much more about urban ghettos of affluence or deprivation that we know about mixed neighborhoods. What types of relations emerge through close residential contact in very unequal

urban contexts? Under what conditions does residential integration facilitate (different types of) social integration? From gentrifying historical centers to high-rise fortified buildings overlooking favelas, Latin American cities offer excellent cases to answer these theoretical questions ■

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