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Title: The bicycle for the rich, poor, working, sporty and transport in Bogotá: a brief history

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ABSTRACT

The bicycle in Bogotá has been used in many ways and has been promoted by different institutions and governments since the mid 19th century. The Marketplace session will describe the history of its use in six different milestones, as a means to describe how cycling becomes part of a city's culture: the first one is the appearance of the bicycle in the urban setting, as a means for recreation for the high class population (a very expensive vehicle). The second milestone is the appearance of the car in the city in 1903, since this fact implied a change of perception towards the bicycle (now starting to be seen as the vehicle for the poor), which in turn decreased its cost in the following years. A third milestone is the appearance of the bicycle for work, since its low cost and versatility made it a perfect vehicle for workers who lived far away from their working places or could use the bicycle as a work vehicle (e.g. policement, construction workers, watchmen, among others). This perception of the bicycle as a work vehicle further changed to a vehicle of sports and glory when, in 1951, the now-traditional "Vuelta a Colombia" race started in the whole country. Another event in 1974 called the Ciclovía (Sunday carfree event) started to move people towards the use of the bicycle as a Sunday recreational and sports event around the entire city, an event that boosted bicycle sales around the city. This event still exists up to date with 121 kms of roads closed for nonmotorised transport. The final milestone is the development of cycleways, in which 300+ kms of them were built around the city since 1998. This final milestone represents the city's urge to promote the bicycle as a transport vehicle for all citizens.

Introduction

Bogotá has been largely known during the last few years for its impressive transformation in urban space and in transport. A new BRT system (TransMilenio), 303 kms of cycleways and thousands of square meters of public space renovation in sidewalks and plazas have made it possible to have a better visual idea of what is happening there. Also, the high profile of its previous mayor Enrique Peñalosa (mandate of 1998-2000) has promoted much further this new identity of the Colombian capital.

However, there are some other factors which have influenced a cultural change in the city, some of which can be traced back to the nineteenth century. One of those is the use of the bicycle in Bogotá. This article briefly describes a series of milestones in the use of the bicycle in the city, based on a short research exercise developed by the authors. The basic argument behind all this is that bicycles are used massively in Bogotá due to many factors, and that the bicycle has been used in many ways since its first appearance in the mid nineteenth century.

Note: this information has been compiled from various bibliographical sources and interviews with Father Efraín Rozo, Antanas Mockus, Jaime Ortiz Mariño, Fabio Zambrano and Ms. Ana de Sánchez.



Figure 1. Three interviewed people (left to right): Ms Ana de Sánchez, Father Efraín Rozo, Antanas Mockus. Sources: Carlos F. Pardo, Fundación Ciudad Humana

1 The status vehicle of the rich

The first milestone in the history of use of the bicycle in Bogotá is based on its arrival in Bogotá. No data is readily available as to when this vehicle appeared in the urban setting, but it is clear that this was near the same time that it was becoming highly popular in Europe, near the 1850's. As it

was initially intended, the bicycle was mainly a recreational vehicle for people of high income levels and it was not seen as a transportation vehicle. The same was seen in Bogotá: its price was near that of a piano, and it was surely used as a status symbol of high-class citizens (see Figure 2).



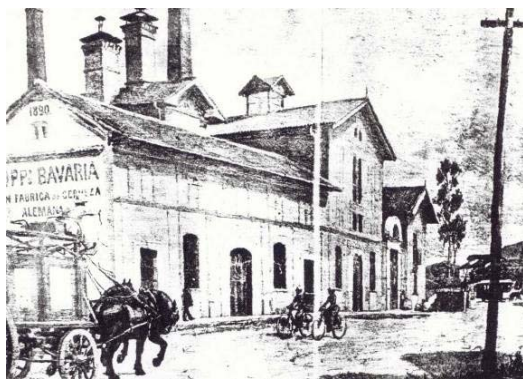
Figure 2. Luis Lara's picture with his bicycle as a symbol of status. La Historia de la Fotografía en Colombia.

Other than a recreational vehicle, the bicycle was also a vehicle which was used by adults rather than children. In the beginning of the XX century, bicycle sports clubs started to prosper in hipodromes around the city. As its popular name of the “iron horse”, the bicycle was also seen as a horse in terms of its characteristics as a “fun” vehicle to ride on with friends (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. A high-class cycling club in Bogotá. Source: Fundación Colombia.

Another very interesting use of the bicycle during this first milestone was its use by women, possibly as a means for transport or recreation (this is not yet clear). Figure 4 shows two women



riding bicycles near a factory. The interesting concept here is that women are allowed to use bicycles when it was first being introduced in the city (this is not the case now, when less than 20% of women bicycle use as a mode of transport). The bicycle was a refined accessory for women and was used as what is now called “a status vehicle”.

Figure 4. Two women riding a bicycle near the Bavaria Beer factory. Source: Carlos F. Pardo

2 Welcoming the car- the bicycle as a vehicle of the masses

The second milestone is the appearance of the car in the city in 1903, since this fact implied a change of perception towards the bicycle (now starting to be seen as the vehicle for the poor), which in turn decreased its cost during the following years. The vehicle started to become a very



common mode of transport, and was started to be used by the post office and police. In high income groups, it had become a recreational vehicle for small children, who would ride around their houses' gardens.

Figure 5. The first car to arrive in Bogotá. Source: Henri Duperly

It is interesting to note that the car was now a vehicle driven by women. As seen in Figure 5, it was women who inaugurated the arrival of the car to modern Bogotá society. It seems that the high-income vehicle had to be portrayed by women, as it should be the smooth-riding, elegant figure on the street. In turn, the bicycle was no longer used by women, and rarely of any income group.

Also, since the bicycle was starting to become a vehicle owned by a considerable amount of people, the transport department issued a bicycle driver's license, where citizens had to ride around two cones without dropping them (in the shape of the number eight), and they would get the license. This license was issued in order to be able to ride on main roads, but riding on minor roads was permitted to all.



So, in this moment the bicycle was changing its status to that of the poor instead of the rich, and in an ever rising manner. However, bicycle ownership rose to a certain extent and it became a popular vehicle, rather than one exclusive for few people.

Figure 6. A mechanic shop in Bogotá, a bicycle on the wall. Source: Fundación Colombia.

3 Work vehicle

The bicycle had become a toy for children once the car had started riding on the streets of Bogotá. Basically, bicycles of wheels between 8 and 24 inches were the main vehicles that were imported

during the decades of 1930s. However, the amount of spare parts increased in 1940 to all other sizes, and the bicycle started becoming a work vehicle (essentially cargo vehicle).

This third milestone is the appearance of the bicycle for work, since its low cost and versatility



made it a perfect vehicle for workers who lived far away from their working places or could use the bicycle as a work vehicle (e.g. construction workers, watchmen and gardeners). Another relevant factor for gardeners to use the bicycle was the fact that they were not allowed in busses with their gardening equipment. At that time and given their level of income, a bicycle was the best way to move around the city.

Figure 7. A gardener in his 80's still rides his bicycle (1933 Phillips) to work in 2002. Source: Carlos F. Pardo

Also, these workers (e.g. watchmen, construction workers) normally lived in the outskirts of the city, and it was still manageable to live outside and work in the city with a bicycle as a main mode of transport. The vehicle had become a working vehicle, be it to be used as a means of working (as in the case of police and post office workers now long established) or as a means to get to their place of work. However, it had never been used predominantly as a mode of transport for high-income users. This was also a determining factor for the bicycle to become associated to low class vehicles.

There is another factor that initiated the higher sales of bicycles in the city: local production of frames, initiated by Aromo, who had initially produced tricycles and bicycles for children and then started expanding his market to bigger vehicles.

4 Sports and glory vehicle

This perception of the bicycle as a work vehicle further changed to a vehicle of sports and glory when, in 1951, the now-traditional “Vuelta a Colombia” race started in the whole country.

Introduced by foreigners (mainly, Mr. Donald Raskin) and a few local enthusiasts, the tour around the country was becoming a great event that would later be a very important event, and would be a platform for great bicycle riders such as Martin Emilio Cochise, Fabio Parra and Lucho Herrera (to mention just a few). Other more local leaders were “El general Arambula”, Juan Pachón (who also had a bicycle shop later) and Leonidas Herrera.

This nationwide event started to promote the bicycle in two ways: the vehicle for sports, and the vehicle to climb up the social ladder. In the second case, the bicycle had become a vehicle in which most low-income people, once seeing that other Colombians like them had arrived at

success with their cycling abilities, thought they could “rise to glory” if they rode hard enough. This would then turn into one of the greatest eras of cycling in Colombia and in Bogotá.

Also, the bicycle became a household item, and the Vuelta a Colombia would serve as well as a platform for further successes of bicycle-related projects in the city.

After the first Vuelta a Colombia, the bicycle was a highly popular vehicle, to the extent that a velodrome was built in the city and Fausto Coppi and the local newspaper were great supporters. This also furthered the use of the bicycle as a utilitarian vehicle, deepening on the character that started during the third milestone, and now people who delivered bread, the mail, gardeners and even meat were everyday users of the vehicle.

Other groups that promoted the use of the bicycle were bicycle clubs, such as the ones that were led by people like Father Roza and other public entities that gave bicycles to their employees. A very popular club was called CicloAses.

5 Vehicle of recreation

In 1974, a group of people from the Bogotá municipality and other bicycle-related entities were



gathered to start the promotion of the bicycle as a mode of transport (however, the event was also promoted by citizens). It was an event called the Ciclovía, which would try to gather citizens in bicycles to use a Sunday morning to know their city better. Some people did not have the chance during the weekend to go to some places in the city, mainly because they were too far to go by bus or the transport would be rather expensive. With the option of the ciclovía, people would be able to ride around the city at no cost in their bicycles. The strength of the mayor at that time would be fundamental for this proposal to be pushed forward, also as a vehicle for both women and men.

Figure 8. Ciclovía in Bogotá: the massive event. Source: Lloyd Wright.

It would not be until two years after that when a decree would make the ciclovía a permanent event, and only until 1983 (with another enthusiastic mayor) would it become a city wide network of roads which were closed to car traffic and only bicycles and other nonmotorised transport modes were

allowed in the scene. The event, however, had started to merge into a recreational Sunday morning, and the initial intention to use the Sunday to shift people into using bicycles would later be displaced by the intention to keep people fit. Obviously, the strength of the Vuelta a Colombia had also influenced this event and its characteristics.



Figure 9. Ciclovía sign. Source: Humane City Foundation.

The Sunday Ciclovía would then become into an event that currently hosts up to 1.7 million citizens who take the current 121 kilometers of network to ride around during the morning, from 7 am to 2pm every Sunday or holiday. The event was initially promoted by the Transport Department of the city, but the management has now been shifted to the Recreation and Sports

Department (since 1995), which has expanded the network and complemented it with aerobics classes and other parallel activities.

It is a clear byproduct of the Sunday ciclovía and the previous stages that the bicycle, now a firmly established recreational vehicle, would boost its sales and use among citizens. On 1995, there would not be a single home in the city that would not have at least one bicycle.

6 Vehicle of transport

The final milestone is the development of cycleways, in which 300+ kms of them were built around the city starting from 1995. This final milestone represents the city's urge to promote the bicycle as a transport vehicle for all citizens, and complements the previous historic milestones of bicycle use in the city. It was (and is) intended that the bicycle becomes again a transport vehicle that most citizens use as they would a car. Also, it was designed to complement the mass transit BRT system (TransMilenio) during Enrique Peñalosa's role as city mayor, and there are currently plans to expand the network into almost 500 kilometers around the city up to 2010.



Figure 10. A father with two children on their bicycles. Source: Carlos F. Pardo

Obviously, the cycleway would represent the city's peak of bicycle use, and it seems that this new infrastructure would fit in perfectly with the existing bicycle culture. Though bicycle use rose from 0.58% to 4% from 1998 to 2004, it seems that bicycles are still a vehicle that symbolizes a sport rather than a transport mode. This is clear also from the fact that few people use city bicycles, and they would prefer using a mountain or road bicycle to go around the city.



Figure 11. Bicycle bridge in Bogotá, connecting two cycleways. Source: Carlos F. Pardo

7 Conclusion: the challenges and way forward

When most sustainable transport advocates and experts talk about Bogotá and its bicycle use, they do so as if it were a finished and perfect process. It is not. Bicycles are seen as a recreational and as a sports mode, but few people do see them as the ideal mode of transport. In most cases in which people use a bicycle, it is because they have few choices and they would rather use a car if given the opportunity. There is yet the challenge to impose the bicycle as a mode of transport to be used massively, as the *ciclovía* promoted its use as a recreational vehicle and the *Vuelta a Colombia* made it the vehicle for sports in the city.

Table 1 shows a summary of the evolution of the bicycle's use, its perception and its users based on each of the limestones described earlier.

Table 1. Summary of users, uses and perception according to limestone

Moment / aspect	Users of bicycles	Uses	Perception
1800s arrival of the bicycle	High class women, high class gentlemen	Transport Recreation	High status
1903 arrival of the car	Children (high class)	Recreation for children	Children
1950 Vuelta a Colombia	Low income people	Sports	(for high status) Low income vehicle
1974 Ciclovía	All population	Sports Recreation	Recreation vehicle for all
1998 Bikeways	??	Transport	??

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