

PROJECT UBICAR

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Abstract

Colombia is situated in the Northwest corner of South America. It is bordered by the Caribbean Sea to the North, Venezuela and Brazil to the East, Peru and Ecuador to the South, the Pacific Ocean to the West, and Panama to the Northwest. The country is currently experiencing a serious issue of displacement caused by violence with more than three million people displaced.

In its mission statement, the Universidad Javeriana highlights seven priority issues, one of these is the displacement caused by violence. In 2001 the Architecture and Design School created project Ubicar to work on the problematic, based on four applications: the Proposal Research Workshop, student practices, social projection, and the research group, in an interdisciplinary environment with students and professors from different departments such as: architecture and industrial design, anthropology, sociology, esthetics, urbanism, ergonomics, technology, psychology, and management.

The project is aimed at the town of Cupica in the department of Choco, situated on the Pacific Ocean coast and to the Northwest of the country near Panama.

The fieldwork has been developed with community participative methodologies and some projects have been implemented. The community has donated land to the University so that it may develop a Center for fieldwork, research, and social support, which shall be developed over the coming years.

Introduction

Colombia

Colombia is situated in the Northwest corner of South America; it extends over 1,141,748 square kilometers and is the fourth largest country in South America after Brazil, Argentina, and Peru respectively. It borders the Caribbean Sea to the North, Venezuela and Brazil to the East, Peru and Ecuador to the South, the Pacific Ocean to the West, and Panama to the Northwest. It has 2,900 kilometers of coast, of which 1,600 border the Caribbean Sea and 1,300 the Pacific Ocean. Although most of the country is in the Torrid Zone, there is a variety of climates according to altitude. Light rainfall is frequent in the highlands but there are two dry seasons: December to March and July to September. Coffee is the primary crop in the highlands (Colombia is the second largest global producer). 95% of the world's production of emeralds is extracted from the rich subsoil. The deposits discovered on the Guajiran Peninsula render Colombia owner of the largest carbon reserves in Latin America.

Colombia has approximately 42 million inhabitants, of which nearly 70% reside in the cities and the rest in rural sectors. The most densely populated area is the Andean region; 75% of the

national population inhabits this area. Following is the Caribbean Coast with 21%, while only 4% of Colombians inhabit the Pacific and the vast regions of Orinoquia and Amazonia.

The majority of the Colombian population is of mixed race: a mixture of the Spanish and their descendants, indigenous people who lived in the region before the Conquest, and black who originally arrived as slaves.

The displacement issue caused by the violence in Colombia

A displaced person is considered to be any person that has been forced to migrate within national territory abandoning their town of residence or normal financial activities because their life, physical integrity, security or personal liberty have been violated, or they are found to be directly threatened under any of the following circumstances: internal armed conflict, internal tensions and disturbances, general violence, massive violation of human rights, infringement to International Humanitarian Right or other circumstances stemming from the previous situations that could disturb or will drastically disturb public order (*Law 387 of July 18, 1997*).

In Colombia displacement caused by violence is linked to the territorial control of some of the country's regions and the urgency of national or international organizations in possessing natural resources. In the last decade, different sources have made calculations and found that there are in-between one and a half to three million people in a situation of displacement (García 2004). According to the CODHES, since 1985 the country has experienced an exodus of two million nine hundred thousand Colombians (CODHES 2003).

Most exiled people are country folk that are forced to abandon their lives and homes, and who look to settle in marginal urban settlements, which demand drastic changes in their socio-cultural dynamics. These transformations are made difficult because most of the time they are stigmatized and discriminated by the receiving communities. These new communities observe them in a polarized manner, consider them victims and therefore they are patronized or are underestimated in their capacities, or they are considered a threat to the communities and are perceived as potential delinquents. Women are responsible for most of the households and more than half of this population corresponds to youths under 19 years of age.

Javeriana University mission

In the immediate future, the priority of the Universidad Javeriana is to promote research and education based on the curriculum, strengthen its position as an interdisciplinary university, and invigorate its presence within the country, particularly contributing to the solutions of the following problems;

- The ethical crisis and the use of the human being.
- The low appreciation for the value of nationality and the lack of conscience regarding cultural identity.
- The intolerance and the ignorance towards plurality and diversity.
- Social discrimination and the concentration of economic and political power.
- The inadequacy and inefficiency of its main institutions.
- The deficiency and lethargy in scientific and technological development.
- The irrationality in the handling of the environment and natural resources.

Project Ubicar

Project Ubicar began in October 2001 as the solution by the Architecture and Design Faculty to the University's concern about the displacement caused by the violence in Colombia.

Project Ubicar is a student and professor workgroup that aims to look for real solutions to the problem of displacement, which is in line with the Javeriana University mission. Ubicar initiated its operations in January 2002 with students from the Architecture and Industrial Design faculty and teachers from different faculties. The fundamental aim is to seek participation and proposals from different possible points of intervention, through interfaculty work (with a particular emphasis on Architecture and Industrial Design) that for the first time will be carried out in the University and the country; acknowledging there are no references on the topic. Today, after six years of work, there is a much wider view of the possible solutions from the Architecture and Industrial Design faculties.

The objective is to contribute physical spatial solutions from an interdisciplinary point of view as well as from the knowledge developed over six years, solutions proposed, and contributions to the investigation developed by other faculties. It takes into account documents, laws, and existing governmental guidelines as well as developments from select NGOs and international entities.

Research methods

Regarding development, Project Ubicar establishes four work modules that constantly feed off one another, each from the standpoint of its own dynamics.

Proposal investigation workshop

The main job of the Proposal Investigation Workshop is to acknowledge the issue of displacement and to propose design solutions. It is designed to receive students from different subjects within the Javeriana University and from other universities. Part of the concept of the “Vertical Workshop”, into which students of different levels are admitted, is that they undertake responsibilities according to their semester. Each faculty participating in the workshop has a Project Director (Architecture and Industrial Design) and a professor for each of the following components: anthropology, sociology, esthetics, urbanism, ergonomics, technology, psychology, and management.

Fieldwork

The aim of the fieldwork is to carry out the proposals developed in the Proposal Research Workshop in real life, during the fieldwork semester for each of the different fields. It is built to receive students from different fields within the Javeriana University. There are one or more field tutors available for each discipline that is participating.

Interdisciplinary research group

The purpose of the interdisciplinary research group is formal research conducted by an interdisciplinary group, oriented towards building knowledge on the displacement forced by violence, from a spatial and object-oriented perspective. It starts from the basic teachings of the proposal research workshop and encourages the participation of other teachings. This module is currently in the initial phases of development.

Consultancy

The objective is one of professional support for Project Ubicar and the communities with which it works. The work is carried out by the Student Office in the Architecture and Design Department.

Architectural and industrial design starting points

The fundamental starting point of project Ubicar is that the displacement caused by violence in Colombia is a real situation that is going to have a significant influence on development, primarily within the country's cities, and moreover, the consequences of which will be present for a very longtime to come. This observation has become more important since Ubicar has concluded that an extremely high percentage of the displaced population is currently located in main cities and has no intention or interest in returning to rural areas. This situation is a consequence of fear as well as a dazzlement of the city's supposed appeal.

Ubicar is based on the postulate that the displacement issue is over-diagnosed and its efforts should be directed at researching and finding rapid solutions of a physical order (spatial, object-based). It considers that "displaced people cannot take refuge under a law, they need housing; they cannot sleep on a government decree, they require a bed; they cannot feed off institutional directives, they need to eat and not from an investigation but from a table, and moreover, they do not beg but have knowledge and experience they can contribute." In this way Ubicar, although recognizing the magnitude of the problem, believes it is an immense opportunity from which to build a country. Furthermore, Ubicar knows that the displacement caused by violence has been a process that is connatural to the history of man.

On the other hand, Ubicar considers that the solutions to the problem are everyone's responsibility: citizens, professionals, students, etc. Considering this criterion, the university, in its mission statement and its educational vision, has the duty and the responsibility to make every effort necessary in order to contribute to the solution of the issue and, particularly in reference to its obligation in educating people, to be service-aware, especially on subjects of national priority. To that effect, given the physical and spatial condition of the issue, Ubicar works from the architecture and industrial design perspective but within an interdisciplinary environment. It is considered that contributions made by the university are very important given that the university focus is of service and training and has no interests of economic or political order. This is in addition to the research and service standings that different subjects of the University already have.

Proposal research workshop - work methodology

The work methodology tends towards cultivating an investigative spirit amongst students as well as to work within an interdisciplinary environment of knowledge building and its systemized recording. To this end, the following actions are carried out: a) research phase contemplating - definition of research, information, analysis, and conclusions; and b) design phase contemplating - proposals and projects. These actions are carried out from the architecture and industrial design perspective and from each of the interdisciplinary components that participates, such as: anthropology, sociology, ergonomics, technology, urbanism, esthetics, and psychology.

Psychology

The aim is to build a psycho-spatial and psycho-objectual interpretation of life accounts that will influence the spatial and object-based designs.

Anthropology

Advances are made in the analysis of changes within relationships of power, which imply new ways of conceiving the world, the city, and urban spatiality itself.

Technology

The use of technologies must be adapted to coexist with the social and cultural framework within which they are employed. Their utility depends upon their feasibility, efficiency and reliability to

provide solutions that are suitable for a region and particular community, as well as to their commitment to the environment.

Sociology

Projects are developed that allow the integration of the displaced into their new lives. These try to address challenges they face such as: new surroundings, different values, navigating the city life, the capacity to be able to survive in a competitive medium, and the impact of an indifferent and manipulating society that fails recognize that these problems exist: our latest national tragedy.

Ergonomics

In some parts of the world it is called “quality of life”; in others it is dubbed “survival”. Regardless of how the term “home” is defined, it is clear that if it is stable and owned or if it is ephemeral and not owned; the human being will live and act in it. Within it, their own existential film will unfold, each minute of their short existence. To live is *to act*.

Urbanism

This component considers displacement as an opportunity to consolidate the context and build a country. The building of Colombian cities has not yet finished. This phenomenon relies on a constant process of consolidation that allows cultural diversity to be esthetically expressed as the result of a conglomerate of shared experiences.

Management

A very simple question must be posed: What makes the projects that are developed specific for displaced populations and not for the rest of the population? The ghost of “discrimination” will always be present. Paternalism is the road least traveled which is why the promotion of autonomy and self-management in processes that are carried out will be decisive.

Esthetics

Colombia is characterized, as nearly all Latin American nations, by its territorial, ethnic and cultural diversity. Consequently, the concepts that are fundamental to the country’s language, forms of perception, changes, representations, techniques, and empirical modalities, give shape to a group of elements that, due to their singular and specific characters, must be submitted to analysis in relation to the factors that underlie forced displacement.

Industrial Design

The proposals developed aim to care for the displaced people who are not delinquent or mentally or physically disabled and that as members of society should receive the same treatment as everyone else.

Architecture

Laws and studies, primarily social and economic, abound; the phenomenon is over-analysed but physical solutions are lacking and attention is diverted by the minutia and political maneuvering. Only in the tangible - in the physical - is where the real solutions can exist. This is where architecture comes into play as the fundamental discipline.

Some of the projects developed at the workshop

- Silvania is a housing Project that contains productive communal areas, for families from the Chocó.
- Camello is an individual productive housing project where shops or workshops are being considered, located in the Ciudad Bolívar locality in the City of Bogotá.

- The Integral Emergency Station provides immediate housing and basic service solutions during the displacement; has moveable and reusable modules.
- The self-sufficient integral farm promotes the displaced populations' own agricultural potential based on the concept of self-sustainability.
- Living in a can is a project that re-uses scrap cans as a basic construction material. It is also used as a solution for kitchens, toilets and rooftop crop gardens.
- Agrohousing is a project that, using materials and the concepts familiar to the displaced people, resolves housing and production together with a do it yourself (DIY) construction systems.
- The Habitagua project solves the issue of water supply by collecting rainwater kept in individual containers in each house. It also solves the solid waste problem and is addressing the elimination of the sewage system resulting in a very significant economic savings. It consists of a dismountable unit that can be taken apart and occupies minimum space due to its multifunctional characteristics.
- Quarries present work opportunities for the displaced in the reforestation of exploited old reserves on the outskirts of the city. Workers are blessed with a temporary three-month urban coupling housing arrangement that includes furniture is an integral part of the plan.
- The Production park in Neiva proposes a complex for training, production, and sale of handicraft products in a manner that integrates them with the recreational activities of the visitors as well as childcare and the education of the children.
- The Andamos Project is dedicated to the production of elements for use in daily life with an aim to export. The basic material used is *papier-maché*: a product made from recycled newspaper. The project proposed is completely integrated into nature and seeks environmental familiarity for the displaced that will facilitate their adaptation to an urban environment. There is a daycare center in the community, thus achieving permanent contact with the parents.

In addition to the above examples, various jobs in the field of architecture and industrial design, which have earned the highest grades, have emerged from the Workshop and practices.

Workshop-Showcasing Events (Cook At The Park)

One of the purposes of Project Ubicar is to make the projects developed by the proposal research workshop into tangible realities. This is how Cook at the Park was developed. The event aims to boost the culinary knowledge of the displaced and allow them to contribute positively to the city. The displaced people have the opportunity to give cookery lessons and, on Sundays, to sell their products made during the week (without abandoning their children) in modules specifically designed for set-up in public spaces. This event has an experimental component at the beginning where displaced people and students participate, and where students learn from their interactions in a very real situation. It is worth highlighting that this project won the second I-REC United Kingdom 2004 student competition.

Research Objectives:

- Find adequate methodologies for “participative design” with vulnerable communities.
- Find new forms of urban planning through experimental methodologies such as those presented by the Senses Workshop.
- Conduct research into the possibilities of adequate use of natural resources within the region (especially wood) as the basis for construction, product development and the revival of cultural identity.
- Exploration of the appropriate architecture and design for this type of community.

Research results

The job of Project Ubicar is made up of various approaches: a) Working with displaced people and/or communities on the outskirts of large cities: generally in risk zones with no service infrastructure. b) Working during times of emergency: from the moment of displacement up until three months later. c) Working with a population that has a high degree of vulnerability.

It is to address this last goal that one of the most relevant jobs for Project Ubicar is undertaken: Cupica

Cupica is a village located in the department of Chocó on the Pacific Ocean seashore. It is a rural district (*corregimiento*) of the Bahía Solano Municipality, with two hundred and fifty houses and one thousand seven hundred afro-descendant inhabitants.



Fig.1. Cupica

The village was originally located at the mouth of the river Cupica on the Pacific, which was swept away and completely destroyed by a river avalanche in 1999.

Previously, in 1997 a group of people from the region of Juradó, Choco (more to the North) that had been displaced by violence, fled to Panama where they were sent back to Colombia. The people from Cupica took them in by lending them land in Cacique so that they could set up home, thus creating a small settlement on the banks of the river Cacique, 5 kilometers North of the Cupica river (Cupica 2).



Fig. 2. Cupica 2

In 1999, the year of the avalanche, the displaced people who had settled in the community in Cacique were forced to return to their native land. However, given the overcrowding and bad conditions, most of the inhabitants moved and created a new settlement on a small island at the tip of a landing strip that had been built by drug-traffickers (Cupica 3 or *La Pista*).

The government subsequently built a new settlement for the community (Cupica 4 or *El Estero*) where most of the original inhabitants are now living. Some of them still remain in Cacique.



Fig. 3. Cupica 4 or El Estero

It was exactly during this period (2004) that the Architecture and design Faculty was contacted through an agreement with the University and the Government Social Action to start a consultancy in connection with the new shanty-town settlement and the difficulties of various natures that this presented. As a result of this work, those of us who had the chance to lead it “fell in love with Cupica” and acquired a bond with the town that went beyond the merely institutional one. Thanks to this, the relationship between Ubicar and Cupica was born from the Workshop, the coursework, but also particularly from the fieldwork.

Thereafter, Project Ubicar undertook a 10-day workshop with the workshop students, where projects considered a priority were developed through participative design with the community. This trip ignited interest amongst the students and some of them went on to choose Cupica as the location where they would undertake their professional training. The placement students implement the projects that have been developed from this fieldwork:

Relevant results of this work worth mentioning:

- Guidelines for the development of Cupica from the Senses Workshop. These guidelines are the result of an experimental workshop which solicited the impressions of the population where the first problems are detected, and from which the plans for development are produced. A close understanding of the habitat is achieved through this.



Fig. 4. Senses workshop

- Senses Workshop. A home improvement plan from various proposals presented by Workshop Ubicar. This plan was later made into a reality and culminated in the graduation project of Diego Avila after the fieldwork semester where various students participated. This interesting piece of work presents House Arana, which consists of a wooden structure that is placed over a one-story bungalow house, thus doubling the area without further use of what little land there is, utilizing local technology, and recovering the local architectonic expression. Furthermore, divisions weaved by the artisans are used. This model is already being implemented in some homes in Cupica.
- Natalia Medina, a student, did her fieldwork in Cupica with Diego Avila, and later developed in her graduation project a plan for the handling of solid waste and for the protection of the environment. This plan has already been implemented in the settlement with a very important impact on the environmental awareness of the inhabitants.
- Publication of the book: “Cupica: what once existed”, (*Lo que alguna vez existio*), by the architect Santiago Pradill who won first prize in the Annual Colombian Architecture Students in 2006. The book is a historical analysis of the four periods of Cupica and suggests a study methodology also based on the senses.
- Graduation project by T Santiago Pradilla on the central park in Cupica, currently under construction.

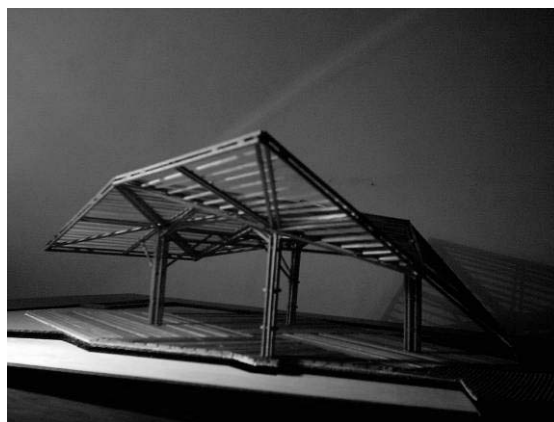


Fig. 5. Element of the central park

Discussion and conclusions

The work conducted by the project UBICAR (Locate) that started in 2002, without any foundation of knowledge or any theory to back it up, currently boasts a significant development after six years of experimentation and research. One of the most important achievements has been the work done in Cupica, where during previous years there has been an important development in work with the community. This cooperative work has gained the respect and trust of the community towards the students and the institution, which in turn have significantly benefited from said work.

When the Architecture and Design Faculty arrived for the time in Cupica and started the consultancy required, they were greeted with a population that was unhappy with the solution given to them by the government. Although it is important to recognize the efforts made and the investment in infrastructure and services (sewage system, aqueduct, electricity network), it is also important to mention that the urbanism and architecture were inadequate. The set up of the population obeys a grid made up of roads and blocks that were more appropriate for an urban development in another kind of city. Cupica had always been spatially organized very differently to this concept: houses were located close to one another in family nuclei. Between houses there was a certain distance that allowed each house a space where every family had means to their own sustenance with a small vegetable garden and some domestic animals. On the other hand, the concept of ownership was based on respect for *daca* [SIC] family, which were acknowledged by everyone. The spatial arrangement of the complex was based on facilitating relationships between housing and *estaco* [SIC] units within particular contexts, especially the close proximity to the sea, given their position as fishermen. They did not have water or a sewage system, or even electricity. Currently in the arrangement of lots of 9 meters wide by 12 deep and row homes, the sense of property has completely changed, thus producing countless social problems that did not exist before. The electricity brought the television. People that once chatted now spend their time watching television with programming that is discordant with their environment. In the past the women used to go down to the river to do the washing where they also sang and talked; nowadays every woman wants to buy a washing machine. There is now prostitution, consumption of alcohol and sometimes drugs: elements that all were alien to their traditions and belong to urban contexts of a different order. Houses that were traditionally made of wood and colors are now drab constructions made of cement blocks. Our work has been centered on understanding the problems of a population confronted with conditions alien to their own essence and, by investing in services, rescuing the values of their own traditions.

The lessons learned have been very important; we have understood how one should work with a village that has become victim to a natural disaster not from the standpoint of the tragedy but that of their potential. The errors of a welfare policy have been highlighted, and a new model is adopted that utilizes the local resources and know-how of the communities, and that restores an identity and sense of self-worth that was lost in the trap of "progress" which was ill-conceived and poorly executed.

The university, along with its responsibility in educating people for the future of our country, also has an undeniable social responsibility. It does not matter if a foreign country with its large cities appears to be the responsibility of another government or institution. Only through the conscience of our students learning and training through direct experience, will a good future for our country be guaranteed.

It is possible that a settlement like Cupica, where the human quality of its inhabitants is immense, provides absolute clarity in that regard. A clear and concrete example is the fact that they have donated land to the Javeriana University so that it may build a center for student fieldwork, professor research and social projection and for conjoint work. This generosity, and even more so, this clear vision of opportunity by the community, should be answered to immediately. That is why

the Architecture and Design Faculty has included the project in its planning for the coming years, and is inviting all faculties of the university to participate; knowing that carrying out the project necessarily implies a conjoint effort as well as an interdisciplinary vision.

Additionally, the work in Cupica is set up by a clear model of how academia should act in real life situations, undertaking work that directly supports the development of the country

Key Lessons Learned

From the experience of the work, specifically from Project Ubicar (Locate) in Cupica it can be concluded that:

- The students that carried out the work in Cupica as part of their practice or coursework and even in the Workshop, have been “touched” by the reality of the country, have become conscious of their social responsibility and have fallen in love with the place. They have formed a group that has persisted, due to personal interest, constantly supporting the community in Cupica.
- The University, represented mainly by its students, is highly regarded and respected by the community of Cupica. This has facilitated the joint work with the town.
- The work conducted in Cupica is a model that is recognized by the University and by diverse governments and other institutions. The work done by the students during their fieldwork surpasses that which is strictly necessary for the degrees and provides volunteer services of a social and human nature.
- The community in Cupica has accepted the ideas of the students and is implementing them.

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Author's Biography



Professor Alfonso Solano de Francisco obtained his degree in architecture with a major in architecture and a minor in landscaping from Javeriana University in 1970. Currently, he is Program Director in Architecture at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Bogotá, Colombia.

Professor Solano has achieved many awards in his career including the National Honor distinction of Teaching Social Work With Meaning from the Professional Council of Architecture and Related Professions. He is involved with many projects including Project Genesis, Project Ubicar, the Senses Workshop, and the Student Office. Professor Solano has presented at many national and international conferences around the world including: Bogota, Cali, Medellin, Cartagena, Barranquilla, Spain, England, Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Guatemala and Ecuador, among others.