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ABSTRACT

Bogota has been presented as a successful example of the current, purportedly more socially sustainable urban policy trend. From “place-making” to “creativity-based” approaches, the planning mainstream appears to embrace a discourse of social tolerance and inclusion in public spaces. Insisting on a discourse of equality, Bogota mayors have sold the city as a model of inclusionary urbanism. A qualitative study of the city’s planning discourse around urban life shows the limits of Bogota’s inclusionary discourse. The article focuses on the use of the concept of urban life in public space planning discourse, noting how it justifies the exclusion of people perceived as sources of disorder. Exploring the different notions behind this concept, the article complicates the content of inclusion behind Bogota’s approach. In addition, it complicates the story of transfer and adaptation that has been told about the adoption of zero-tolerance tactics in Latin America. The article also argues for the careful examination of strategies ostensibly predicated on the promotion of urban life, taking into account the kind of inclusion they promote and its effects on the most vulnerable urban populations.

Introduction

The life of the city has long played a role in articulating planning and architectural visions for the city (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1984; Simmel 2004). From J.L. Sert’s modernist “urban biology” (Sert 1942, 3) to critics of modernism, like Jane Jacobs’ “death and life” of the city (1961) and Jan Gehl’s “life between buildings” (2008, 2010), urban scholars have articulated their visions for the city in terms of fostering urban life. Continuing in this tradition, new planning paradigms—from creativity-based approaches to place-making—emphasize city life as a key area of intervention. The current, seemingly more progressive, turn in urban politics that calls for more inclusionary cities understands social inclusion as an element for the promotion of urban vitality (see, among others, Florida 2005; Gehl 2010; Lerner 2014; Peñalosa 2009; Whyte 2001). Concerns about the liveliness or livability of cities (or bringing them back to life—their revitalization) are at the center of current planning discourse and practice.

But what do planners really mean when they articulate visions for the city in terms of urban life?
In this article, I interrogate how the concept of urban life is deployed by Bogota planners. I am interested in this concept as key to understand some of the contradictions of Bogota’s purportedly inclusionary urbanism: The exclusion of vulnerable populations such as the homeless and street vendors from public spaces in the name of inclusionary public spaces.

Bogota’s case is often used in upbeat accounts of a city capable of astonishing transformation: 1990’s news accounts presented a city besieged by violence and mired in a sense of unviability. At the turn of the century, however, newspaper travel sections, documentary films and the planning community joined to celebrate the city’s apparent and improbable rise from the ashes (Dalsgaard 2009; Fettig 2008). They highlighted an altogether different story, elevating Bogota to model city and “beacon of hope for cities rich and poor” (Burdett 2006) —as judged by the Venice Biennale panel that awarded the “Golden Lion” award in 2006. Often hyperbolic, what Berney (2017, 8) calls the “dystopia to hope reenvision” story, emphasized interventions in public space and public transport as more than just beautification efforts. Rather, they were construed as the infrastructure for urban democracy. The basis of an urban social policy to produce a more equal city (UCtelevision 2009; Urban Age 2007). In a way, urban scholars were ready to embrace this story because it offered a glimmer of hope for an urban world dominated by developing world cities plagued by increasing inequalities and a policy landscape defined by aggressive, revanchist approaches (Beckett and Godoy 2010; Cervero 2005; Gilbert 2006; G. Martin, Ceballos, and Ariza 2004; Montezuma 2005).

But the status of Bogota as a model in turn of the century urban planning has also attracted significant critical attention. Critical studies of the circulation of knowledge and “best practices,” have documented the global networks involved in producing the “Bogota model” (Montero 2017b) as well as the marketing efforts, simplifications and mischaracterizations incurred by the city and its leaders to bolster this process (Duque Franco 2011; Montero 2017a). In addition, a sizeable body of work has documented the exclusions many of Bogota’s citizens —its street vendors and homeless people in particular, face daily in the purportedly model city (Cordy and Bañales 2007; Maldonado and Hurtado 1997; Vargas and Urinboyev 2015). Donovan (2008, 2010), for example, documents what he calls “wars” for public space as street vendors were forcibly removed from various locations. The various forms of continuing harassment against homeless, sex workers and other such populations by city authorities and community groups have also
attracted scholarly attention (Ritterbusch 2011, 2016; Galvis 2014). These studies show how under the same policies sold as progressive steps toward a more equal city, denials of any real sense of inclusion are routine for many of the city’s poor. Recent literature has likewise documented how, despite the aforementioned egalitarian discourse, exclusionary urban policies persist across Latin America (Aufseeser 2014; Bromley and Mackie 2009; Crossa 2009; Freeman 2012; Swanson 2007, 2013; Schmidt and Robaina 2017).

While this literature documents the various forms of exclusion such populations have been subject to, this article focuses on the discursive constructions that allow planners to justify such exclusions in the name of inclusionary policies. I build upon critiques of the use of liveliness and livability as urban planning goals (Evans 2002; Hankins and Powers 2009; Kaal 2011; McCann 2008), to show how Bogota planners justify depriving many of the city’s poorest citizens of their livelihoods while purporting to nurture the life of the city. I suggest that the persistence of these exclusions is internal to the various notions of urban life articulated in planning discourse.

To achieve this, the article teases out the uses of urban life in planning discourse, calling attention to the work they do to articulate equality in Bogota’s public spaces. Interviews with public space planners reveal how the concept of urban life relates to the city’s recent changes. While the literature on contemporary urban exclusion in Latin America emphasizes zero-tolerance discourses and practices (Swanson 2013; Valenzuela Aguilera 2013; Davis 2013; Becker and Müller 2013), I focus on the use of inclusionary discourse to frame urban exclusions. In doing so, the article contributes to debates about the nature of so-called post-revanchist approaches in Latin America and beyond (DeVerteuil 2014, 2006; Herbert 2011; Huang, Xue, and Li 2014; Mackie, Bromley, and Brown 2014; Murphy 2009). Bogota’s approach was, after all, one of the first to be presented as a working alternative to revanchist urban policies (Beckett and Godoy 2010; Hunt 2009; Pérez Fernández 2010). In addition, the article adds to a mounting critique of “place-making” and “creativity” approaches predicated, on paper, on promoting lively and inclusive public spaces (Peck 2005; McCann 2007, 2002; Donegan and Lowe 2008). In the following section, I explore the literature on liveliness and livability, two concepts associated with this discourse of urban life. Thereafter, the main body of the article is organized in three sections: The first provides some context for the production of planning discourse around urban life in Bogota and explains the approach to analyze this discourse. The second analyzes the use liveliness and livability in Bogota’s
planning discourse. Before concluding, the third explores the contradictions between these two concepts and how they work to justify the exclusion of certain subjects from public space.

**Urban life: Liveliness and Livability**

City life has long been a theme in urban studies. Fin de siècle urban sociology based its analysis of industrial society on what they called “metropolitan life” (Simmel 2004). They proposed Urban Ecology as the systematic study of urban societies as living ecosystems of relations, transactions and competition for resources (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1984). Ever since, references to the city as a living thing have served to theorize and politicize aspects ranging from architectural design (Sert 1942; Kurokawa 2000) to the city’s connections with the environment (Gandy 2004; Heynen, Swyngedouw, and Kaika 2006). For instance Kurokawa (2000, 6), rejecting the strictures of modernist planning, proposed a new ”Age of life [which] represents an age of pluralism and diversity.” This pluralism, tied to unscripted, happenstance street-level social relations has also been theorized as essential for the development of an inclusive, democratic urban society (Avritzer 2009; Gehl 1989; Jacobs 1961; Light and Smith 1998; D. Mitchell 2003; Whyte 2001).

In Bogota, vida urbana, the concept most commonly referred to by my planning informants refers to more than a vital and diverse urban social life: The emergent discourse of vida urbana in public spaces served to talk about both lively and livable space. Urban life, as vida urbana can be more directly translated, collapses into one both liveliness and livability, concepts with a history in the English-language geography and urban planning literature dating at least since to the 1980’s.

Liveliness, defined as the existence of socially active and vibrant spaces that foster urban democracy and diversity has a long history in planning literatures (Fincher and Iveson 2008; Florida 2005; Gehl 1989, 2008; Holston 1999; Jacobs 1961; Whyte 2001). Geographers have engaged with this concept critically, noting how notions of diversity, creativity and vibrancy are often spatialized in ways that produce or reinforce exclusions (McCann 2002; Peck 2005; Stacheli and Mitchell 2008). Likewise, livability loosely defined as the quality of life provided in a place, has long featured in the planning literature (Dumbaugh 2005; Godschalk 2004; Wheeler 1998, 2013) and also considered critically by geographers (Evans 2002; Hankins and Powers 2009; Kaal 2011; Kraftl 2014; Lees and Demeritt 1998; Ley 1990; McCann 2007; Pacione 1990 among many others).
As Keller (2010) aptly shows, references to livability often point to the ordering of the spatial and social features of the city. All manner of planning and policing paradigms based on the regulation of street life have been predicated on livability or quality of life (McCann 2008; Vitale 2008).

As a concept and a practical planning goal, urban life refers to both street-level democratic inclusion and the social and spatial ordering of the city (Blomley 2010a). In Bogota’s planning discourse the contradictions between liveliness and livability come to the fore: Accounts of a livable city imply a degree of order and security. A lively city, however, cannot be overregulated or staged. As Staeheli (2010) notes, a crucial facet to this contradiction are political questions about orderly or disorderly urban life. Sorting out these contradictions clarifies how policies ostensibly predicated on openness and diversity turn out working against these very principles, by privileging very limiting notions of order and security as necessary preconditions for proper urban life.

Order is key to various theorizations of urban life. Blomley (2007, 2010a, 2010b), for example, highlights the contradictions between ordering the efficient flow of people and things and ideals about diversity and inclusion in vibrant public spaces. Blomley links this contradiction to Foucault’s ideas about the regulation of commerce in the history of governmentality. Foucault called this “police power,” or the state’s prerogative to effect order beyond the theoretical inclusion of liberal democracy. As Blomley (2012) notes, this matters because the administrative logics of police power are separate from larger political principles. Ordering the right place for different people and activities obeys different logics than providing for democratic inclusion in public space. Relocating the power to order the city as separate from politics does not mean, however, that the exclusions emerging as a result of this ordering ought to be accepted in the name of the greater good (D. G. Martin 2012). Highlighting the places where liveliness and livability collide helps reveal what kind—and for whom—the lively and livable city is supposed to be.

Focusing on the role of order in fostering urban life also helps explain how Bogota’s approach can at once challenge the discourse of revanchism in Latin America and engage in the very purification strategies it is supposedly challenging (Beckett and Godoy 2010). The literature about zero-tolerance approaches in Latin America has tended to highlight the story of northern trends of global reach that “headed south” (Swanson 2007; K. Mitchell and Beckett 2008). Bogota’s emphasis on seemingly inclusionary politics has been singled out as a softer adaptation of these
trends (Pardo 2007; Hunt 2009; Berney 2010, 2011). Some, even, have celebrated Bogota for avoiding the aggressive aspects of zero-tolerance policing (Beckett and Godoy 2010). Looking carefully at how Bogota planners understood their interventions to foster urban life nuances this picture. Disentangling the various notions internal to the concept of urban life shows how Bogota’s approach is fully compatible with the goals and methods of revanchist purification.

Analyzing planners’ notion of urban life as both liveliness and livability is a way to understand their work as more than just the local adaptation of zero-tolerance policing (Swanson 2013). An analysis of their discourse suggests, instead, that Bogota’s exclusions respond to administrative logics of order and circulation. Indeed, in describing their policies, Bogota planners made surprisingly little reference to zero-tolerance or broken windows policing. In contrast, they talked about “places that work” serving their intended purpose and the “right” places for different peoples and things.

This analysis also frames planners’ talk of equality as more than just empty rhetoric. Anchored in a long tradition of urbanism as social policy (Hatch 1984; Holston 1995, 1999; Stickells 2011 among others), Bogota planners understood their space-producing role as an opportunity to design more equal relations between different classes of people in public space. Considering their notions of liveliness and livability shows the limits of this equality. Planners singled out street vendors and homeless people as agents of disorder that threaten urban life preventing a more equal society to materialize. They talked about these subjects as “invaders” besieging proper urban citizenship. In doing so, planners harkened back to deep-seated notions of “uncivilized” and “uneducated” racialized lower classes at the root of Latin American liberal thought (Henderson 2001; Jacobsen 2005; Alberdi 2006). Rather than softening the rough edges of an imported zero-tolerance, Bogota’s inclusionary discourse makes more sense as an articulation of social difference that sees disorder—and disorderly people—as threats to proper, civilized inclusion.

Beyond the case of Bogota, urban life is interesting for its influence in current planning theory and practice. Urban life has influential global advocates (Gehl 2008, 2010; Worpole 2000). Sometimes inspired by or referring to the case of Bogota, planning paradigms such as place-making, are predicated on promoting diversity (Whyte 2001; UN-Habitat 2011). Critical assessments of these theories have pointed out the extent to which revitalization initiatives have often resulted in municipally-aided processes of gentrification (Smith 2002). These critics note
how revitalization often works to obscure the growing class inequalities produced by neoliberal development (McCann 2007, 2008; Peck 2005). They analyze the political economic implications of place-making, unveiling the consequences it entails for different kinds of people, from the racialized poor to sex workers, street vendors and the homeless (D. Mitchell 2003; Staeheli and Mitchell 2008; Herbert 2008; Beckett and Herbert 2010).

I follow these critiques to show how, in the discourse of public space planners, the glorification of lively public spaces works to suppress claims to urban space from some of the city’s most vulnerable. At first glance, Bogota is moving away from the kind of urban renewal that leads to further gentrification (Janoschka, Sequera, and Salinas 2013). If anything, Bogota's public space projects have been criticized for not being sufficiently geared toward classical urban renewal. Likewise, studies show that the most iconic interventions in public space have not had a significant effect on real estate property values in surrounding areas (Jaramillo and Flechas 2006). But this apparent economic failure barely registers in planners’ discourse. On their part, revitalization is much more than a merely economic project. It is instead an attempt to create a particular social order, putting people and things in their rightful places by securing a livable and lively city.

**Urban Life in Planning discourse**

This analysis of planning discourse focuses on the content and uses of the concept of urban life by Bogota planners. The focus is on planners involved in the production of the public space policies that for many commentators defined the “Bogota model” in the late 90’s and early 2000’s. While policy and its outcomes are a relevant source of information, I focus on the experts in charge of producing and implementing policy (Li 2005; Boyer 2008). By focusing on expert discourse, I am not implying that these ideas are homogeneously circulated throughout the state bureaucracy and seamlessly enforced as coherent policy. Nor am I implying that they are passively received on the ground by different kinds of people. Indeed, the populations I single out as subject of exclusion devise various methods to resist, reinterpreting or otherwise negotiate their livelihoods vis-à-vis official policy (Donovan 2002, 2008; Parra Vera 2006; Morris Rincón 2011). At the same time, as powerful discourse capable of both constructing policy and interpreting its meaning to the public, expert discourse is a very valuable source for understanding the workings of state power (Ferguson 1990; T. Mitchell 2002).
To analyze expert discourse, 51 semi-structured interviews with key informants were carried out, including officials, former officials and experts hired by the city. Key informants were recruited based on their work as mid and high-level officials in the Planning Department (Secretaría Distrital de Planeación - SDP) and Public Space Ombudsman Office (Defensoría del Espacio Público –DADEP). These are the two main cabinet-level departments involved in drafting and implementing public space policy. Ongoing recruitment through snowball sampling continued until a saturation point was reached, when the difference between isolated opinions and pervasive discourse in the planning community was clearly discernible (Hay 2000). Informants participated in drafting public space policy from the first Mockus administration (1995-98) to the Petro administration (2012-16). One policy proposal from the current Peñalosa administration is also considered. A significant majority of informants served during the Mockus – Peñalosa – Mockus decade (1995-2004), during which most of the groundwork for current public space policy was laid down. For example, during this period the DADEP was created as a cabinet-level department. More importantly, during Mockus’ second term, the Public Space Master Plan (Plan Maestro de Espacio Público –PMEP) was drafted (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá 2005). I focus on this decade because it was then that Bogota officials started to position public space as a crucial element of city planning, drawing a direct connection between public space and the promotion of a more equal city.

While many political changes have occurred in the city over the last 20 years, critics and proponents of the “Bogota model” coincide in singling out this decade as a turning point in the focus, content and implementation of planning discourse. Political differences between various administrations aside, it is possible to identify persistent trends in planning discourse about public space starting in the mid 90’s. Indeed, it was then that an emphasis on public space and its associated discourse of urban life took hold among Bogota planners. Before the mid 90’s, public space was not an important part of the city’s political or planning discourse. Ahead of the 1991 mayoral elections, for example, the city’s leading architects complained about the candidates’ “[lack of] grasp of the concept of public space, which is not just a sidewalk or a street, it is a city where you live, eat, breathe and work” (Vallejo 1991). In their frustration, as well as in their association between public space policy and city life, the architects signaled the upcoming change in the discourse about public space in Bogota: The leading El Tiempo daily published about 200 articles about public space in 1990; the same outlet published about 2000 in 1998.
Public space has remained as a central feature of Bogota’s planning discourse, even after the Peñalosa-Mockus decade. For instance, the forms of community governance of public spaces inspired by early notions of liveliness and enshrined in the PMEP, continued and grew from 2005 onwards, during the Garzón, Moreno and Petro administrations (Galvis 2014). A discourse of urban life survives in planning circles despite the particular emphases various administrations gave to public space policy during their tenure. Notwithstanding the extent to which the legacy of the 95-05 decade –for good or bad, survives in the current policymaking landscape, an analysis of urban life in Bogota’s planning discourse is useful to direct attention to how the supposedly inclusionary moves at the core of the “Bogota model” serve to further entrench the exclusion of particular populations from public spaces.

The key informants included several heads and former heads of SPD and DADEP as well as other high-level officials. Informants were asked about the process of producing public space policy and the goals (if sometimes unrealized) of such policy. They were also asked about their ideal public spaces, specifically as related to the production of urban equality. Interview transcripts, policy documents, reports, city council ordinances and public statements were analyzed systematically using NVIVO.

The concept of ‘urban life’ along which this article is structured, emerged from the analysis of these interviews. The idea of generating a lively/livable city was key among informants to explain what kind of public space they sought to produce. Asked about the characteristics of a successful public space, informants used the idea of urban life often:

*I think public space has to be diverse, the more activities you can have there, the livelier, the happier it is.*

*… The ideal public space must have commerce, must have life.* (Interview with PMEP consultant)

*Or job as [public space officials] is to promote that one person talks to another, that a passerby sees life here.* (Interview with high-ranking SPD official)

Statements such as these are indicative of the centrality of urban life for Bogota planners. Their quotes in this article are representative of this emergent discourse, which connected planners’
normative notions of the public space the city ought to have with their notions of order and the threats against which public spaces should be protected. In talking about life in public space, planners articulated a discourse which was pervasive across different administrations. Despite disagreements about how to implement these ideas on the ground or ideological positions about the publicity of public space, planners were surprisingly consistent in highlighting urban life as a key aspect of public space. In what follows, I analyze this discourse around the concepts of liveliness and livability, exposing the contradictions inherent to it.

Life in Bogota: Liveliness and Livability

A discourse of urban life was key in articulating planners’ normative ideas of what inclusionary public spaces should be. This section explores how planning discourse envisioned public spaces as i) *lively* in their capacity to offer happening and diverse environments, and ii) *livable* in that they are secured and ordered. Organizing the analysis along these two sides of the notion of urban life shows how its meaning is articulated in relation to specific subjects, thus questioning planning discourse about public spaces as places to address social difference. Ultimately, a critical analysis of the concept of urban life in planning discourse reveals how the exclusions commonly identified with revanchist approaches are also integral to Bogota’s purportedly inclusionary discourse. Digging deeper into the concept of urban life suggests that the exclusionary policies documented there, far from adaptations of globally circulating methods, respond directly to planners’ notions about who are worthy subjects of a lively and livable city.

In our conversations, Bogota public space planners described their job as infusing life into public spaces. In doing so, they described urban life in terms of what the literature described above defines as *liveliness*: Asked about what makes a successful public space, planners talked about unprompted social interaction and unrestricted access. In this version, a lively place is one free from excessive limits set by regulation or design. More importantly, it is a place defined by its openness to a diversity of peoples and activities. This celebration of diversity was, in turn, related to the political role of public space as a locus of democratic interaction. Beyond being open as places for unscripted social contact, Bogota planners described public spaces as key for the circulation of ideas and political debate. In the words of one influential planner, in lively public spaces all forms of social public expression are included:
A plaza, should work one day as a market, the next day a military parade, another day a religious procession, and the next day just for one person to go from City Hall to the church. [It should foster] quotidian urban life, ceremonial urban life and political and popular expression. (High-ranking SDP official)

Bogota public space planners saw in a lively city the antidote against the corporatization of social life in shopping malls (D. Mitchell 2003; Staehe li and Mitchell 2006). Moreover, lively public space mattered as a direct way for various social classes to address their differences. According to this discourse, lively public spaces that are open to a diversity of peoples and activities work as the locus of urban equality. Likewise, when liveliness and openness are choked off by regulating access or otherwise obstructing urban life, social equality is threatened. Mayor Peñalosa insisted with tireless consistency on importance of lively public spaces and the risks of dead ones:

[obstructing access] creates a more segregated city, a more exclusionary city where higher income people leave and what public space should be, a place for all to meet as equals independently of our socio-economic position, dies (Negrón 2010b)

This discourse played a role in guaranteeing an influential spot in the international lecture circuit for Peñalosa and other Bogota officials (Galvis 2017). Producing lively public spaces was for them not just a quaint feature of the beautifying city; it was of the essence in producing a more egalitarian urban society.

Liveliness was crucial to spatialize an egalitarian discourse in public space. But alongside references to lively public spaces as inclusive and diverse, Bogota planners also referenced urban life in the ways the literature refers to as livability. This logic of livability was most prominent when planners talked about public space in concrete ways as a policy tool, rather than as the abstract space where social difference would be addressed. This was particularly salient in discussing Bogota’s famed pedagogical interventions in public space (Hunt 2009; Berney 2011, 2017). As the planner quoted below makes clear, the political importance of urban life goes beyond just inclusion:

public space was the classroom where we had to intervene for people to change behaviors. … [W]e start to
see the need that someone [be in charge] of public space [because it] is a crucial part of the governmental process. There is [where] people are going to feel if there is a government or not: if you have a degree of control over what happens in that space (Former SDP head)

This quote is an example of how planners construe orderly citizens as essential to producing a livable city. City life here concerns the staging of a controlled environment. For example, in a telling passage of her account serving in Mockus’ cabinet, Government Secretary Alicia Silva noted how in promoting pedagogical approaches “[t]he administration’s vision was to implement strategies directed at different aspects of city life with the goal of improving the ‘urban climate’ and thus reduce violence and criminality” (Silva Nigrinis 2009, 48). In this way, Bogota public space discourse does not seem to depart much from the general objectives of broken windows policing: Orderly public spaces deter further disorder by teaching people how to behave properly. The unconventional nature of Mockus’s interventions in urban life—or, as Silva puts it, its “climate,” certainly secured the attention of Bogotanos and international commentators alike. The main goal of these interventions, indeed, according to Silva, the main vision of Mockus’ administrations as a whole, was to produce an ordered and secure environment (Silva Nigrinis 2009, 44). Mayor Mockus, made this point very clearly in an interview:

So the goals were: To increase voluntary rule compliance, to increase people’s capacity to kindly correct each other to follow the rules … The state appears when people make themselves citizens. There is something in common with the theory of zero-tolerance: Small behaviors matter. But the difference is people first have to listen. If we all learn to understand the rules, following them becomes less an issue of the stick. (Negrón 2010a).

Notably, Bogota’s strategy in public spaces stemmed from the need to regulate “small behaviors.” As many a street vendor in Bogota knows all too well, this strategy does not preclude “the stick.” However, it is in regulating the life of the street that the municipal state finds the opportunity to perform its pedagogical moves. In Bogota’s planning discourse, public spaces were key as places to produce a livable city by effecting order in them.

This recourse to livability can be seen more clearly when considering planners’ notions of the city as a living being. Urban life, in this case, was related to the city’s good health and the interventions
needed to preserve it. Using bodily metaphors, planners made statements about how the city worked, listed the threats and pathologies to be addressed and the treatments available. A planner’s description of the importance of public space for the city’s health is revealing:

*If I have problems in public space, the city collapses, it's like the blood system in the human body [public space] makes the city work like a human body, and so if I alter the life of a particular [public space] I start to create a series of problems in the rest of the city.* (National Planning Department official)

The life of public spaces, in this version, matters beyond lively, inclusionary places or stages for pedagogical intervention. Crucially, it matters as evidence of the good health of the whole city. These metaphors were often mobilized to highlight the need for order in public spaces. Poorly behaved citizens—or those that will not learn from Bogota’s pedagogical exercises, were construed as threats to the city’s life. These metaphors of a healthy city are an example of what the literature describes as livability. One of the most revealing examples of this approach was the embrace of “urban acupuncture.”

Starting in the late nineties, programs to infuse life in various city neighborhoods by beatifying small city parks were described as “urban acupuncture:” pinprick interventions to preserve the overall health of the city (Lerner 2014). This approach continues to this day. Under discussion in the city council is the creation of “Beautification and Appropriation Zones - ZEA” to “recover the vitality of areas suffering physical and social deterioration (...) beautifying and making them safer” and “recover the vital signs of specific areas” (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota 2016, 1 emphasis added). It is also no surprise that the protection of the city’s “vital signs” goes hand in hand with the pedagogical moves so entrenched in Bogota’s policymaking (Berney 2011, 2017). Almost requisite in myriad policy and planning instruments since the mid-nineties, the proposed plan for ZEA’s includes among its objectives to “incentivize a culture of citizenship [to] form citizens interested in working together to (...) improve their quality of life” (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota 2016, 2).

Small scale, strategically located interventions provide a locus for urban social interaction that transcends the intervention area itself. These loci of vitality are supposed to have a contagion effect in surrounding neighborhoods and ultimately improve the overall health of the city. Lively spaces, in other words, are supposed to help induce a more livable city. Accounts of the links
between small scale liveliness and large scale livability are revealing about who exactly is supposed to enjoy (and not) urban life.

Alongside the pedagogical side effects mentioned earlier, the proposal for ZEA’s makes clear that lively spaces become livable by “guarantee[ing] the displacement of the agents of insecurity and disorder that have coopted public spaces” (Alcaldia Mayor de Bogota 2016, 2). In other words, providing the environment for the right kind of people and the right kind of liveliness, the city would be able to marginalize the threats to the city’s good health and “recover its vital signs.” Explicit mention of who exactly these agents are is not explicitly defined in the plan for ZEA’s. But this is not an oversight. This reference to “agents of disorder and insecurity” has a long history in Bogota policymaking. Among them, in particular, are street vendors and the homeless (Donovan 2002; Galvis 2014).

Talking about the life of the city, Bogota planners referred to logics of liveliness and livability. In the abstract, these could be seen as just two separate tracks in the notion of urban life: The former connected to visions about the ideally inclusive public spaces, the latter to the governing goals of the city’s administration. Indeed, they could be construed as two discourses proposed separately by the two mayors of the Mockus-Peñalosa decade. I argue, however, that the key insight about the role of urban life in planning discourse comes from looking at how these are intrinsically connected. The plan for “urban acupuncture” and other medical metaphors and interventions to protect the health of the city suggests contradictory connections between inclusive liveliness and orderly livability. These contradictions are most evident when the concepts of liveliness and livability are applied to specific, concrete subjects, such as street vendors and the homeless. In the following section, I explore these connections.

The Living City: Contradictions and Exclusions

In this section, I explore how the apparent contradictions between promoting liveliness while pursuing livability are solved when considering specific subjects and “agents of disorder and insecurity” such as street vendors and the homeless in public spaces. In short, I propose that the coming together of these two logics under the notion of urban life only makes sense given the exclusion of subjects that are perceived to threaten the health and order of the city. In planners’
discourse, in other words, a healthy, lively Bogota necessitates the exclusion of many of its most vulnerable citizens from public spaces. Exploring in more detail the views of urban life as it relates to these subjects reveals the exclusionary nature of urban life in Bogota’s public space planning discourse. Moreover, it reveals how the aggressive methods documented in Bogota against these populations (for some examples, see Donovan 2008; Galvis 2014; Ritterbusch 2011) are not just a perversion of an otherwise inclusive policy. Their exclusion is in fact at the core of a discourse about preserving the life of a more equal city.

In interviews with Bogota planning officials, contradictions surrounding the concept of urban life emerged quickly. They did so most clearly when planners considered subjects such as homeless people. A planner, for example, during a conversation about public space planning as a tool to achieve a more equitable society, made clear the challenges the homeless pose to his idea of a lively public space:

*I am excited when I see a [homeless person] who can enjoy public space … If [they] lie down to get some sun for a moment. That’s ok. But if the homeless person appropriates a bench to live there … then that doesn’t work anymore: You enjoy this space but allow others to use it too.* (High-ranking SDP official)

Merely being homeless does not qualify your ability to partake in the inclusive nature of public spaces. In fact, a homeless person that sits “for a moment” to enjoy the park represents a powerful symbol of the inclusive potential of Bogota’s public spaces. However, sleeping or “living” in the park—some of the material conditions that define a homeless person in the first place—are deemed unfair because they represent unacceptable private encroachment.

This idea of certain kinds of people taking advantage of a public good for private benefit was pivotal in planners’ discourse about urban life and its relationship to producing an egalitarian city. Indeed, notions of inclusion in the lively city were often qualified by notions of how the presence of certain subjects in public space subtracts from urban life:

*Life is that which is more inclusive: If you walk by and see people sitting [in this outdoor café]… Life is what we are doing here: people talking to one another … A stand selling magazines and cookies*
and chocolates is invading the ground not with people, but with the exclusive use of one single person who is exploiting the use of public space and taking space away from people. (high-ranking SDP official)

The planner’s argument starts with a notion of urban life as lively unscripted interaction, with room for everyone. He ends resorting to livability, depicting the typical vendor as an encroachment working against universal public access and, crucially, impeding proper flow. The change from liveliness to livability is thus qualified by different kinds of urban life: An outdoor café adds to lively public interaction whereas a street vendor subtracts from the city’s livability. The role of encroachment and circulation as features of this discourse cannot be understated: the planner celebrates the outdoor café as a valuable opportunity to have “people sitting” and condemns the street vendor for obstructing people’s passage.

In keeping with place-making paradigms, Bogota planning discourse about urban life places a significant emphasis on producing places where people want to stay rather than move past. At the same time, people like street vendors and the homeless are regarded as overstaying their welcome. This planner describes good public spaces as those that slow down the city to a contemplative stroll, a momentary spell on a park bench to enjoy some sun. Actually remaining in these spaces is seen as stealing space away from the legitimate enjoyment of others. The key distinction, however, is not about the amount of time that separates acceptable temporary enjoyment from permanent encroachment. Instead, the distinction is based on the difference between merely enjoying public space and actually living on or off it: urinating, washing, sleeping, and making a living selling chocolates should have their own places somewhere else. This suggests that the motivation to create a livable city is not just about creating a general sense of order. It is also about sorting out specific people and activities and their diverse claims for public space. In other words, about assigning the proper spatial and social place for everyone.

Like many approaches described in literature as “post-revanchist” or “compassionate” (Herbert 2011; Mackie, Swanson, and Goode 2017; Murphy 2009), this position is not articulated as an attack on the public provision of services for the most vulnerable. Rather, it is presented as a way to order the city by providing the proper places for the different elements of urban life. Crucially, these distinctions reveal underlying notions about the purpose of having lively spaces, who are
these places for and, therefore, who should be excluded for a lively place to serve its purpose. Making an argument about the need to keep “disorganized” street vendors from “invading” public space, a planner noted how order is necessary to create the conditions that make the right people stay:

*An ordered environment creates security. That is one of the most important aspects in a city … As long as people feel safe, they can feel a sense of belonging toward public space [they] will use [it] more frequently, not just to go from one place to the other, but to remain there.* (High-ranking SDP official)

In line with standard broken windows doctrine, security is said to emerge from the creation of orderly environments. Proof that street vending or panhandling alone make places less secure is nowhere to be found. But the point planners make about security is not that that vendors or the homeless themselves are or attract criminals. Rather, planners argue that they scare away the right kind of people, the ones that should remain in public space to make it lively. The deployment of logics of circulation to make this point is striking considering planners’ rhetorical commitment to social equality: Street vendors and the homeless should not be allowed to stay put because they scare away or obstruct the movement of others. Vendors and the homeless should be removed to encourage these others to stick around.

Such discourse makes sense only because talk of order is not just about efficient circulation and talk of security is not just about crime reduction. Rather, it is an expression of a notion of urban life underpinned by ideas about the right social and spatial place for different peoples and activities. This suggests, moreover, that their discourse about pedagogical intervention and equality is less about education and outright inclusion and more about guaranteeing a particular social order in public space. Such notion of urban life explains why Bogota could produce policies to push street vendors out of certain areas, while simultaneously boasting of inclusionary and socially sustainable urban policy.

I highlight planners’ contradictions as evidence of how a particular notion of a social order is implicit in their discourse and not to reveal their talk about equality as mere deceit. Indeed, looking at how planners solve their own contradictory discourse provides evidence of how Bogota’s approach works at once to promote an abstract version of equality and deny many of the city’s
most vulnerable of their livelihoods.

The most prevalent way for planners to make sense of the contradictions between promoting lively spaces and producing a livable city was to abstract the meaning of inclusion. When faced with the specific, differential claims for public space, planners deferred to the general collective as the ultimate owner of the city:

[Vendors] are using a public good that belongs to everyone and limiting the space to be and circulate for millions of citizens … Public space belongs to 8 million citizens [in Bogota, and] if I use it for my benefit I am taking it away from them. (High-ranking SDP official)

In a classical liberal move, diversity dissolves into the general public. Everyone is welcome to partake in public space as if they were all equal, as long as they do not upset a general sense of order. Disorder, in turn, threatens the life of public space and its ability to neutrally welcome everyone. Disrupting this order or using public space for one’s own benefit is seen as an infringement on the sanctity of the abstract general public. The contradictions inherent to Bogota’s notion of urban life in public spaces are eluded by dissolving the concrete, embodied difference represented by subjects that “abuse” public space. Ironically enough, the abstract life of the city is given preeminence over that of people who are literally living in, or making a living off, public space.

Despite all the talk about abstract equality, the material conditions that produce differential claims for public space are of the essence in defining what kinds of people threaten urban life. In other words, Bogota planning discourse requires the specific claims of people like street vendors and the homeless to be out of the picture for abstract, classless subjects to safely exercise their right to the city.

Conclusion

Bogota’s public space planning discourse is at first sight inspired by the progressive motivation of promoting urban life in inclusionary public spaces. An analysis of this discourse shows the confluence of two different understandings of urban life. On one hand, it is presented as
unscripted liveliness. On the other hand, livability is evoked to talk about making order and providing the proper physical and social places for people and activities. This dual nature complicates the picture of Bogota as a working alternative to aggressive revanchism. Indeed, though the city has been celebrated for its pedagogical approaches as well as for its emphasis on inclusion, planners’ notions of successful public spaces reveal an intent to sort out subjects, putting them in their right places.

Like other urban strategies centered on diversity and creativity, Bogota’s celebration of diversity works to effectively proscribe subjects like the homeless and activities like street vending from public spaces. Not only that, both are presented as threats to the vital signs of the city. Similarly, the appeal to order and security works to further proscribe these people and activities, presenting them as blights or as urban pathologies that grant removal and relocation to their other physical and social spaces.

Bogota’s planners insist on presenting urban life as a key element defining the meaning of inclusionary public spaces. The analysis of discourse presented here shows, however, how the kind of urban life they promote is tied to specific notions of the right citizens and activities that should be included in public spaces. Urban life thus plays a role in justifying both the general formulation of an inclusionary policy and the exclusions performed in its name on the ground. Indeed, contradicting notions of urban life, movement and order in the city reveal the subjects to whom equality—and a rhetorical right to the city—is directed in Bogota: Those that have the material ability to enjoy the diversity of activities that lively public spaces should offer.

The pervasiveness of this kind of discourse throughout Bogota’s public space planning community suggests that the city’s fame as an experiment in urban inclusion must be qualified by the experience of many of its most vulnerable citizens. Analyzing the discourse of planners shows that aggressive enforcement against people like vendors and the homeless is not just a deviation or unintended consequence of otherwise inclusionary discourse. Instead, embedded in the very notion of what constitutes the life of the city are the justifications for these exclusions.

However, looking at planning discourse also reveals how the implementation of zero-tolerance practices is far more complicated than the uncritical adoption of models applied elsewhere. While
in some instances “inter-referencing” (Roy 2011) such policies, Bogota’s implementation of aggressive, exclusionary urbanism cannot be construed as elite revenge to recover the city from the working classes. Indeed, what throughout Latin America has been theorized as the adoption of street purification strategies can be contextualized in Bogota as part of a larger process to solidify one version of urban life (Swanson 2013). By the same token, Bogota's approach confirms the serious limitations of compassionate or post-revanchist approaches (Herbert 2011; Murphy 2009; Sparks 2012). Indeed, the case of Bogota shows how claims to more progressive forms of urban governance often cloak exclusionary agendas (Hennigan 2016; May and Cloke 2014; Van Puymbroeck, Blondeel, and Vandevoordt 2014).

Public spaces have been theorized by critical urban geographers as a site of the struggles and revenges of class dialectics (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 1989; Smith 1996). Bogota urban planners see public space as a site where these dialectics should dissolve. In fact, they see removing the stubborn reminders of socio-economic difference as the best way to defend the life of public spaces. As the contradictions between logics of liveliness and livability emerging in the discourse of Bogota’s planners expose, allusions to the inclusiveness of space do not bar the exclusion of the very people whose livelihood depends on actively exercising a right to the city. The implementation of place-making strategies in other cities may respond to different logics, mobilizing urban life in ways that make claims for inclusionary urbanism more genuine. As the case of Bogota suggests, however, other mobilizations of urban life as a way to promote urban equality must be judged not in terms of their abstract embrace of equality, but rather on the way they treat those whose life and livelihood actually depend on realizing their right to the city.

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