

Infrastructures of hope. Urban design for new mobilities in Latin American cities

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The paper discusses the contribution of urban design to the infrastructural mobility projects involved in the regeneration of informal areas. Some Latin American examples show how these interventions have helped to shape new images of these cities. The paper investigates thus how urban design can contribute to successful interventions for mobility and discusses the peculiarities of interventions in informal areas. In many settings in fact interventions on mobility and on public spaces are strongly related and oriented by common socio-political aims: we may define them as infrastructures of hope, trying to design new mobilities and opportunities for deprived areas. Thanks to their effectiveness and originality, these interventions are now recognized examples, becoming almost part of a mainstream new approach to the issues of urban regeneration and mobility in urban fabrics, as well represented by cities like Medellín, Bogotá or Rio de Janeiro.

These interventions deal with different issues and fields of contemporary urban design, and in particular raise three relevant questions concerning urban design and its relationship with mobility and urban design. The first point is the nature of contemporary interventions for mobility. Within mobile societies, the infrastructures of mobility are no more simple monofunctional artifacts which allow movement from A to B, but become the support for manifold practices (Sheller and Urry 2006). Urban design can thus differently contribute to manifold practices and uses. The second point considers the fact that interventions in the field of mobility, even with the tools of urban design, can be related to the achievement of wider socio-political aims, considering them as a crucial feature towards a full citizenship for all (Del Rio 2012). A third point instead concerns the interventions of urban design in informal settlements, and the

examples here discussed try to create encounters between different, formal and informal forms of urban design (La Cecla 2015).

These initial issues are investigated observing the most emblematic Latin American infrastructural interventions for mobility and their different roles, focusing on three specific examples. First of all, infrastructures have been in themselves tools of intervention: they have been crucial for the creation of wider transportation systems serving entire cities, as shown by Bogotá's TransMilenio (a bus rapid transit network connecting every neighbourhood of the Colombian capital) (Ardila-Gomez 2004). Secondly, infrastructures have also acted as catalysts, promoting further transformations around the new transport corridors: Medellín and its Metrocable, a cableway system connecting impervious informal barrios, show how new public spaces have been created around the stations and how they act as places of encounter, where traditional and new activities are hosted (Davila 2013). Thirdly, infrastructural interventions contributed to the creation of a new image of the city: it can be intended as the ways in which people actually experience cities, as well as its perceptions outside and inside the city. Thanks to Rio de Janeiro's favela cableways, local inhabitants and tourists have appreciated the new overall image of informal neighbourhoods, visible from above and providing a vision in contrast with that of the tangled and unsafe areas (Magalhães 2010).

The paper allows to observe peculiar forms of urban design, whose significant results are achieved at different scales and transform collective spaces as well as individual lives. First of all, mobility infrastructures seem to have peculiar forms of urban design. Their significant results are achieved at different scales: from the small stop carefully designed, to the large corridors reshaping the surrounding spaces. Furthermore, the political target of a more just city, originated by a progressive political approach to urban government, influences the concept of these projects. These infrastructures also show place-specific forms of urban design, which face the formal – informal relationship with interventions that focus on punctual actions and do not simply consider informal settlements as areas to be adapted to a more formal design. Some issues require further reflections, of course. When referring to mobility, urban design has to reserve specific attention to the practices that it can fosters or prevent,

and the interaction of formal intervention tools with informal settlements requires a specific attention. Moreover, the described approach maybe is too specific of Latin American countries, so that their potential relevance for other settings could be questioned. Nevertheless, the described projects really appear as infrastructures of hope: their creation has achieved unexpected results, becoming able to redesign urban spaces and even the lives that they host.