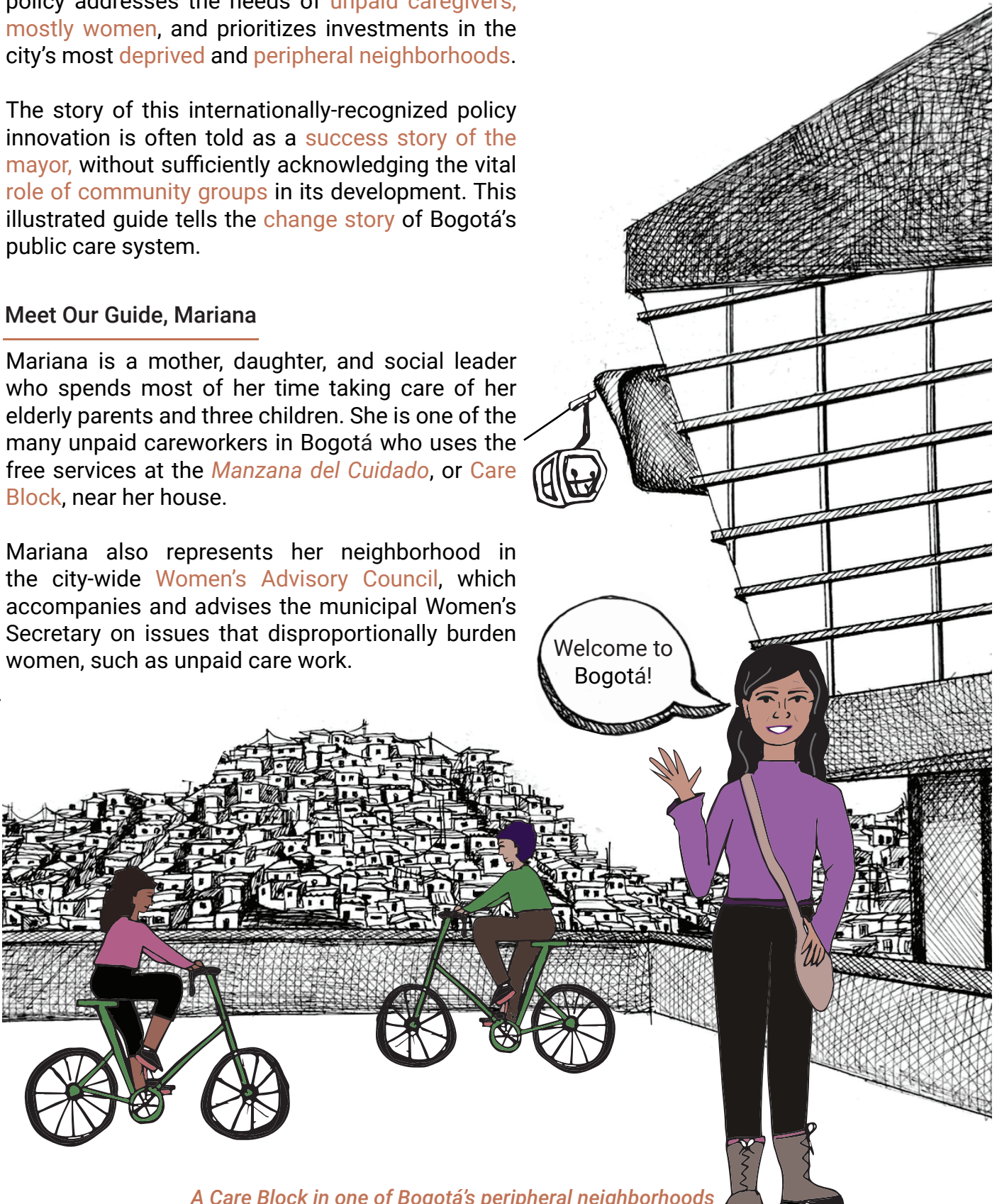# Change Stories

Bogotá, Colombia

In 2020, Bogotá was the first city in the Americas to implement a public care system that recognizes intersectional vulnerabilities and inequities. The policy addresses the needs of unpaid caregivers, mostly women, and prioritizes investments in the city's most deprived and peripheral neighborhoods.

The story of this internationally-recognized policy innovation is often told as a success story of the mayor, without sufficiently acknowledging the vital role of community groups in its development. This illustrated guide tells the change story of Bogotá's public care system.

Meet Our Guide, Mariana

Mariana is a mother, daughter, and social leader who spends most of her time taking care of her elderly parents and three children. She is one of the many unpaid careworkers in Bogotá who uses the free services at the *Manzana del Cuidado*, or Care Block, near her house.

Mariana also represents her neighborhood in the city-wide Women's Advisory Council, which accompanies and advises the municipal Women's Secretary on issues that disproportionally burden women, such as unpaid care work.

A Care Block in one of Bogotá's peripheral neighborhoods

Caregivers bear an unfair share of labor in Bogotá.

The majority of women in Bogotá engage in unpaid care work, restricting their opportunities for paid work, social mobility, and positive health and wellbeing.

7.9 Million
Population of Bogotá

Bogotá sits at the base of the Cerros Orientales mountains and has grown dramatically over the past seven decades, resulting in the growth of informal neighborhoods, and increased spatial and social segregation.

1.1 Million
women in Bogotá who spend more than **6 hours** daily in unpaid care work

90%
of these women are low income

52%
of these women cannot access the labor market due to high care burden

73%
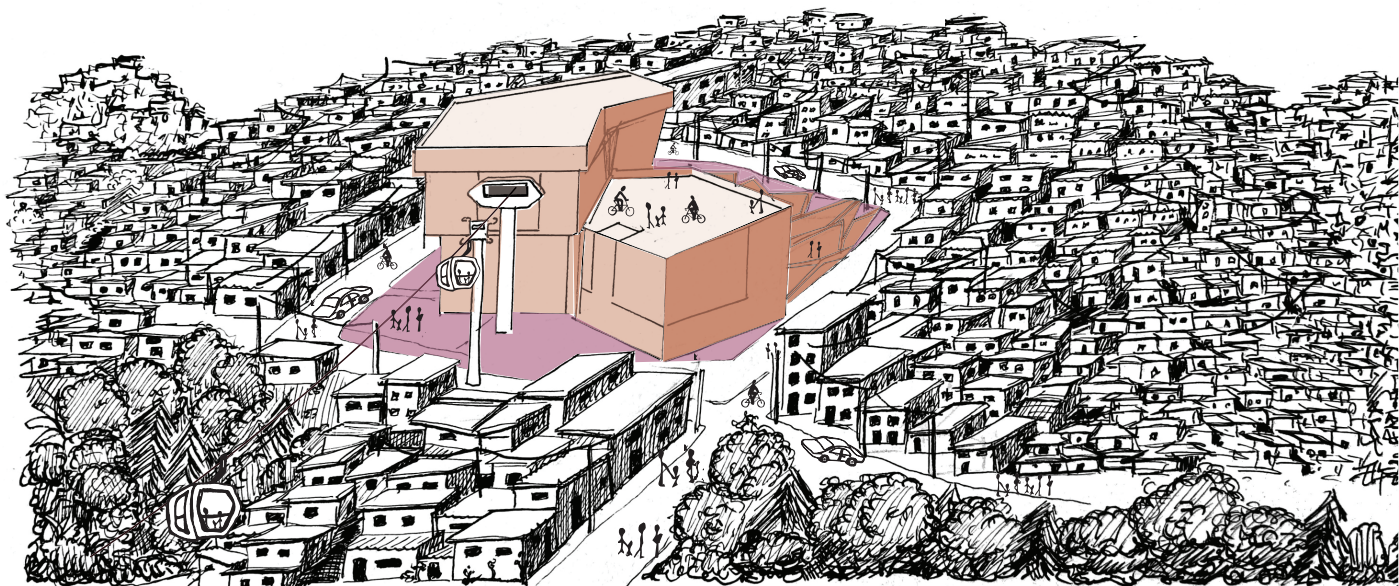of all women in Bogotá have not continued their education past high school

Before the Care Blocks, I spent almost all of my time caring for others. I had no time left for myself.

One thing I really wanted was to finish high school.

The city acted with an innovative program of care infrastructure.

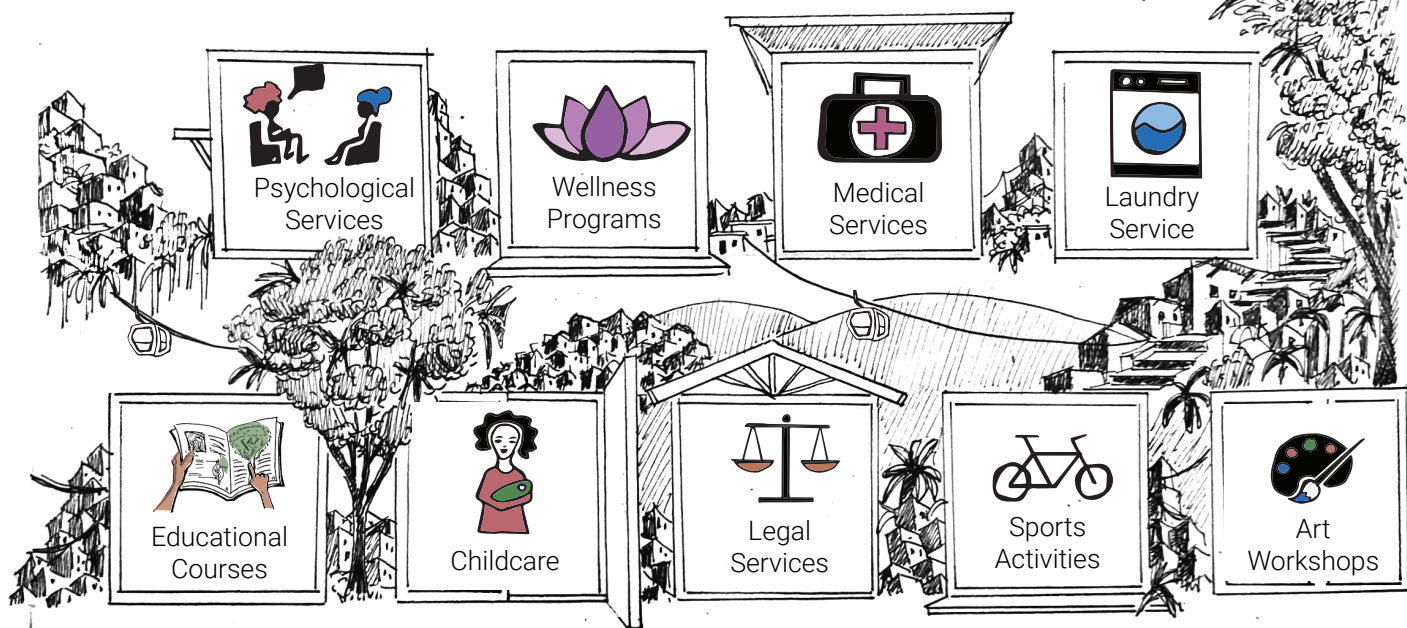It created the Care Block program to support unpaid caregivers with rest and free services.

A Care Block in Ciudad Bolívar

The program is based on the "3 R's": **R**ecognize **R**edistribute **R**educe unpaid care workers' burden.
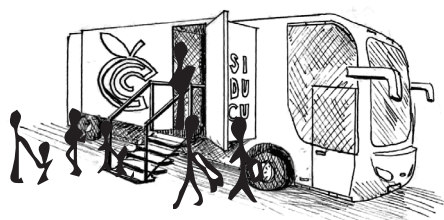
Care Blocks provide **free, comprehensive services and educational courses** to unpaid care workers.

Most importantly, while caregivers attend classes or services, Care Block employees care for their dependents.

Psychological Services

Wellness Programs

Medical Services

Laundry Service

Educational Courses

Childcare
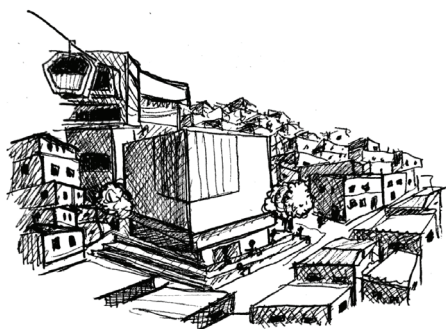
Legal Services

Sports Activities

Art Workshops

Care Blocks are **hosted** in a variety of **unique physical spaces** in neighborhoods where the services are needed most.
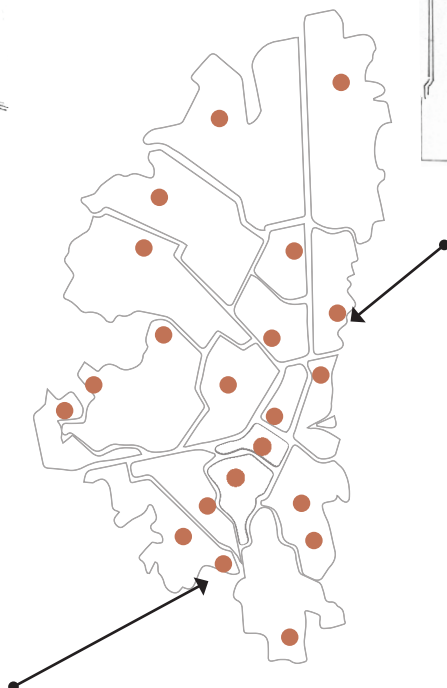
So far, the city has repurposed and currently uses 23 spaces to host Care Blocks and has a plan to open 22 more by 2035.

*The **Mobile Care Block Units** are buses that are dispatched to peripheral semi-urban neighborhoods or areas that lack infrastructure and services.*
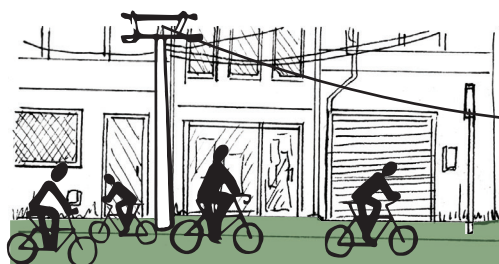

*The building that now hosts the **Los Mártires Care Block** was expropriated by the city due to illegal activities and was repurposed into an art center and later into a Care Block.*

*The **Manitas Care Block** is located in a TransMiCable station.*

Map of Care Blocks in Bogotá

● *Care Block*

15km

Thanks to the fact that the Care Blocks provided childcare, I was able to finish my high school degree.

Bogotá uses public policies in a narrative that **transforms** and **rebrands the city**.

Care Blocks fit into a larger context of innovative public policies that have gained national and international recognition. These initiatives often center mayors as key figures in these change stories rather than the communities who have advocated for these initiatives for decades.
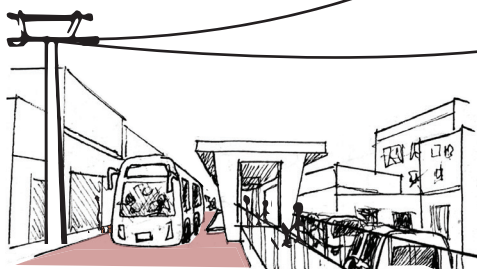
Ciclovía
1974
128 kilometers of Sunday morning road closures that invite cycling, running, walking, and meeting across the segregated social fabric of the city.

Bold policy innovations on the district level are popular because Bogotá mayorship is often a springboard to the presidency.
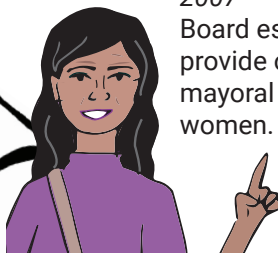
Democratization and Decentralization
1990s - present
1. Direct election of Bogotá mayor
2. Increased participation of civil society in political institutions

TransMilenio
2000 - present
Bus rapid transit system implemented to alleviate traffic congestion.

The founding of this council is one of the outcomes of decentralization and organized participation of civil society.

Women's Advisory Council Founded
2007
Board established to provide oversight of mayoral policies related to women.

TransMiCable
2016 - present
Gondola system that connects low-income, high-altitude neighborhoods with the city's public transit network.

Plan Terrazas
2020
Initiative to support self-help housing improvements in informal urban areas.
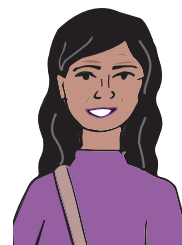
Public Care Policy
2020
Policy to alleviate low-income women's unpaid care work organized around Care Blocks. It was Mayor Claudia Lopez's (2019-2023) key program.

Some of these policies are being adopted around the world.

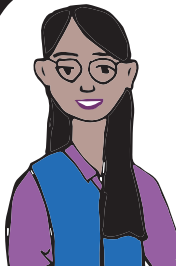"Caring, inclusive, sustainable, and conscious Bogotá."

Claudia Lopéz's slogan during her governance

This is only **part of the story** of Care Blocks. Alternative narratives show the key role of community organizing that drives change in the city.

The public care system was successful thanks to a collaboration of social movements pushing for this change, political willingness, committed street bureaucrats, civil society demands and appropriation, and support of international agencies.

It was due to our hard work in the Women's Council that we managed to institutionalize the program. Now, all Bogotá mayors are required to allocate a budget for the public care system.
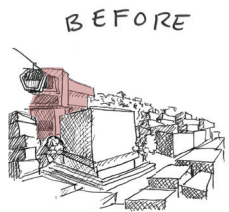
The Women's Council directly engages the Women's Secretary and formulates the projects, drawing on their grassroots experience, actively participating in policy development.

We have been accompanying the public policy on women and gender equality since its creation, from the first equality plan to the present.

Sofia
Social leader and member of the Women's Advisory Council

Maria
Academic and Political activist

Ana Paula
Member of the Women's Advisory Council and care worker

Community Representation

DURING

BEFORE

AFTER

Conventional Representation

A democratic governance system was developed to allow for community voices to be communicated to decision-makers in order to inform equitable and sustainable policies, such as the public care system.

Before the public care policy, the Manitas Care Block site was a TransMiCable station

The public care system aims to use existing structures for Care Blocks. Here, the Manitas Care Block is located within the TransMiCable station.
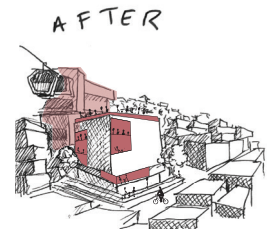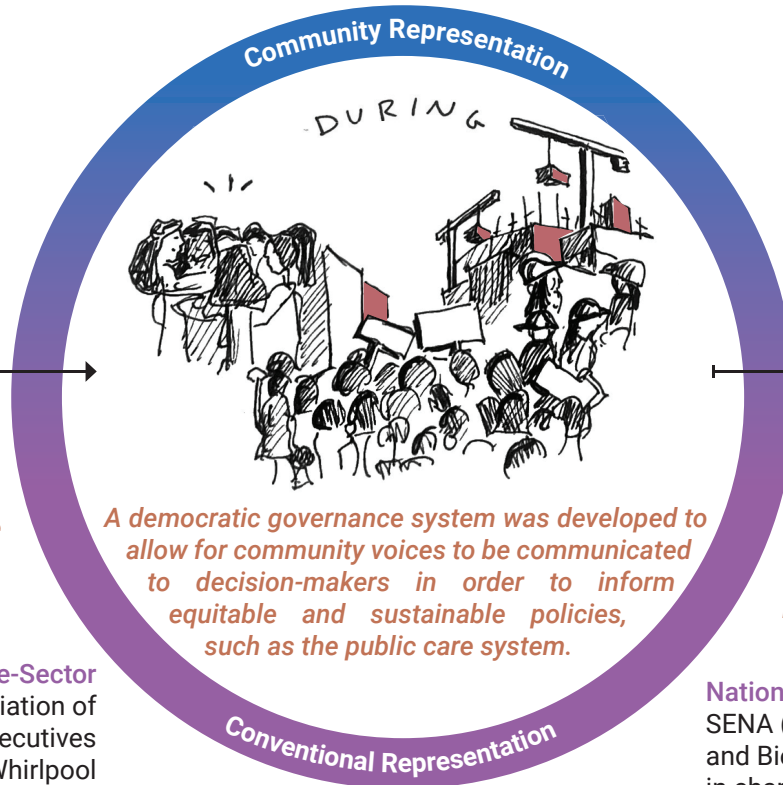
Private-Sector
National Association of Colombian Business Executives (ANDI), Vanti, and Whirlpool

International
United Nations Development Program, UN Women, the International Finance Corporation, and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Municipal
Mayor Women's Secretary

National
SENA (National's Learning Service) and Bienestar Familiar (the agency in charge of children and family protection)

Academic
Universidad de Los Andes, Universidad Javeriana, La Universidad Nacional, and the Intersectional Roundtable on Care Economies

Bogotá is a **laboratory of innovative policies** and systems that turned the city into an internationally admired model for sustainable urban development. However, as we have seen, **key community actors** are often **left out of the story.** Sharing the full **change story** is important to understand Bogotá's successes.

Let's Meet

CHANGE STORIES

CHANGE STORIES

Change Stories is an international research partnership that aims to **spark dialogue and learning** through storytelling about **sustainable urban development.**
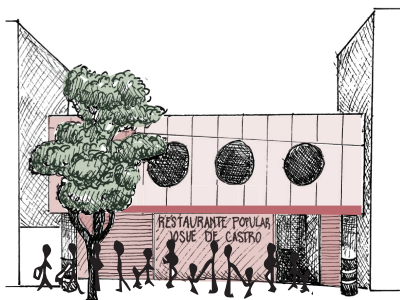
The project's vision is to **shift the paradigm of how we tell stories** about successful **urban change & who tells them**, leading cities to develop deeply contextual solutions that support **health, sustainability, equity & wellbeing.**

Three case study cities demonstrate sustainable urban development that meet the needs of marginalized groups. Using **participatory and ethnographic methods** we are exploring these "**change stories**" and the context in which the transformation occurred.
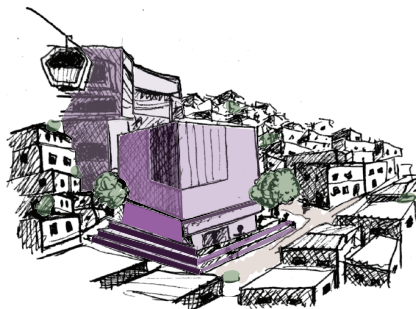
Belo Horizonte
Brazil

The Belo Horizonte case explores trajectories towards guaranteeing food and nutritional security, analyzing the interactions between urban governance and social mobilization in the development, maintenance and expansion of food security policies in the city.

A "People's Restaurant" in Belo Horizonte
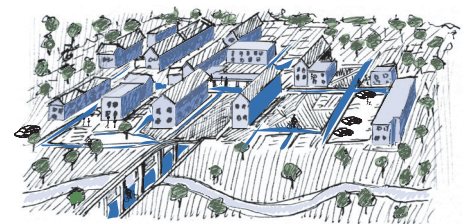
Bogotá
Colombia

The Bogotá case explores a public care system, which operates mainly through *Manzanas del Cuidado* (Care Blocks) and asks how, in a patriarchal culture, the needs of unpaid female caregivers receive resource priority.

A "Care Block" in Bogotá

Belfast
Northern Ireland

The Belfast case focuses on housing and asks how, in the context of recent sectarianism and segregation, have communities in Belfast been successful at bringing about significant change for marginalized residents, despite low input from government.

Plan for social housing in Belfast

Connect with us!

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For more information about Care Blocks, visit: https://manzanasdelcuidado.gov.co/.

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Get to know the project!

CHANGE
STORIES