Facing Growth through Permeability:

120 PROJECTS FOR CARACAS

Diego Luna Quintanilla / EMU Thesis / July 2011
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I Facing growth through permeability

The accelerated growth that Caracas experienced during the twentieth century resulted in a superimposition of different urban patterns not always in proper dialogue between each other. The irregular political structure was supported by an increasingly powerful new economy which generated growth promoted by two opposite extremes. From above, the city was promoted by the public and private sector under the influence of ideological models claiming to have a sole and absolute response to the rapid urban development of the twentieth century. Real estate developments adopted the suburban “garden city” model for the elites, while state policies gave a touch of post-war modernity to this model, on the grounds of “social utopia”. The set of one-way urban policies instigated alternative responses by those who were excluded from the system, giving a final shape to urban needs in a spontaneous model of growth (also called informal) promoted from the bottom. This parallel growth never reached an effective dialogue and growth models became patterns of exclusion. As a result, the contemporary profile of Caracas lies on a fragmented urban structure, physically inaccessible, setting a segregated social configuration.

Today, a national housing crisis has revealed the rapid growth that Caracas continues to face. In spite of the precedents, the growth model that prevails today is even more totalitarian and suburban. The pressure on the national government to resolve the crisis has promoted the construction of satellite cities unrelated to the existing city and following standard
By combining both strategies in an interdependent system, the proposal seeks to transform the hermetic urban structure in a porous system through local interventions supported by urban policies that provide infrastructure and sustaining an idea of metropolitan permeability.

In order to illustrate the strategy, two analysis and study areas were selected, close to each other but with very different characteristics. Through these two case studies this work seeks to reflect on the implications of such proposals and assess the costs and benefits involved in the process. The goal is not to impose a model but to create new possibilities for integration and access in the existing urban structure in order to support future growth and densification. The combination of strategies in two scales, seeks to move toward a flexible urban model of progressive growth, resilient and sustainable over time.
II Introduction

Growth
Latin American cities are characterized by a continued rapid urbanization in fast growing cities and regions. It is estimated that, by 2015, 22 of the world’s 26 megacities will be in developing countries, and several of them will have populations of 20-30 million. The phenomenon of rapid urbanization is often followed by confrontations between planned and unplanned developments. The clashes between different urban typologies become the physical manifestation of the great differences between rich and poor, where the welfare distribution takes place through spatial devices that have relevant consequences in the social inequality. The differences increase as the city grows, pushing the lower classes to extreme living conditions.

Within this trend, a current housing crisis in Venezuela has become clear evidence of the urban conditions of Caracas and its imminent growth. The city must provide space and infrastructure to 1.4 million citizens that are currently living in overcrowded and precarious urban conditions. By adding to this figure the rate of growth of the population, by 2016 Caracas must provide space for 2 million new inhabitants and this will happen either in a planned or an unplanned way. These figures imply serious considerations on the existing urban patterns. In general terms, to face growth, existing density patterns and spatial structures, have significant role in influencing the way the city will develop. For instance, if a policy of intensification is advocated, cities with lower densities have more possibilities to accept the growth taking advantage of existing infrastructure and services; on the other hand cities with higher densities might need to expand their urban borders. Whether strategies for intensification or expansion will take place in Caracas, the existing city will continue to be the main attractor of employment, services and urban life, hence the main provider of opportunities. Therefore the existing city must reinvent itself not only to avoid further infrastructure overload, congestion and environmental and social degradation, but also to allow equal access to opportunities and in this way avoid the increase of the existing social differences. Thus, the growth of Caracas should be focused on facilitating and promoting improvements in accessibility.

Accessibility
Caracas’ urban and social structure has demanded substantial changes for decades, to transform it into an inclusive city. Its fast growth was due to a suburban logic that did not envisage the required joints with the old city. Today, Caracas is read as an agglomeration of fragments morphologically and typologically different. According to this form, the radical confrontation of the neighboring fabrics, emphasize in their borders the differences in disjointed urban patterns. Further to the rapid growth phenomenon, the process of urbanization of Caracas was always followed by demand for space that has caused a progressive and aggressive informal occupation of the territory. Mostly based on self-construction housing, a large portion of the population has gradually occupied vacant land that was left out from both, the private market and the public initiatives. In most of the cases unstable slopes with high risk of collapse and banks of creeks have been urbanized in an uncontrolled way and unsuitable for construction. The progressive occupation takes place without any kind of urban plans and infrastructure, public spaces and public services that guarantee the required health and quality of life to ensure the welfare of the society.

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1 Katie Williams, Can urban intensification contribute to sustainable cities? An International Perspective.
who remain on the fringe of housing policies and are excluded from the urban dynamics. The result is a “dual city” where the top-down planned fragments do not interact with the bottom-up spontaneous fragments, despite the physical proximity between them. This urban condition has led to strong inequalities related with the quality of the living environment which become increasingly important when defining and differentiating social groups.

The concept of quality of the living environment is related with the ability of the physical location to allow access of its inhabitants to basic services (drinking water and energy), public facilities (health, education and security), urban dynamics (work and public transport), public interaction (amenities and public spaces), and infrastructure to ensure welfare. The differences in the quality of living environment is a physical attribute that already acquired economic and social dimensions as these characteristics allow unequal access to opportunities, giving advantages to certain groups over others. The inequalities related to a specific place represent the basic point which defines the concept of social segregation.

Bernardo Secchi defines what he calls “the new urban question” around the concepts of rich and poor in relation with accessibility to opportunities. Following his own words, the adjective “rich” not only refers to people with high income anymore, also people with cultural capital (in relation with level of education) and spatial capital (in relation with the systematic social relations with people on highest social levels) are considered “rich” too, hence, “poor” refers to those who lack these qualities, in this sense:

“Affluent is the person, family or social group with consistent and visible spatial capital, for instance, those living and working in the urban spaces with most services and highest quality(…). At the same time poor is not only low income or assets person, family or social group, but poor are also those who cannot, even potentially, access fundamental goods and services that are necessary for their own survival”. 4

Therefore there is a spatial urban dimension behind the differentiation between social groups, which constitutes the ‘spatial capital’ attributed to them. According to this, certain urban features allow social groups to have different degrees of access to the opportunities that will define their status. The term access implies movement, relations and interaction, but also freedom; for a city to allow equal access to opportunities, it must provide the conditions for free movement including spaces for human interaction.

In the present condition of Caracas, the problem of accessibility is evident in the impermeable limits between fragments which not only reinforce the fragmented conditions but also increases the isolation of certain areas, limiting the spatial and social integration with the rest of the city and blocking the connectivity, triggering to traffic congestion and excluding pedestrian networks as an organizing structure of the city. This reflects the car based logic in which the city was immersed since the beginning of the process of expansion, which seeking a metropolitan ideal. A consequence of having a city built for cars is the lack of attention to pedestrians, therefore the lack of public spaces and insufficient public transport infrastructure. In this sense, a pedestrian oriented strategy will have a big impact on accessibility if we consider walking as the truly expression of freedom in terms of urban flows.

But a bigger question goes beyond if we add to the current conditions the imminent future growth described above. The problem is increasing exponentially, the population has kept growing and the authorities have not been efficient in the management of the demands. The approach must focus not only to addressing current problems but, by doing so, to be able to explore strategies to face the growth, in order to avoid the widening of problem. The current housing crisis and the pressure for urban space will transform the city anyway, the challenge is therefore to be able to guide these changes towards an upgrading of the structure of city as a way to reach social cohesion and avoid future social segregation as the city grows.

Part 1

HISTORY OF GROWTH

The current conditions of the city in relation with the models chosen to face the impending growth belong to a similar logic, the nature of the strategies being taken is deeply settled in the bases of the Venezuelan urban tradition. In order to identify, analyze and react against specific urban features and case studies, is compulsory to understand the process of urbanization of the Caracas and the ideals behind the construction of a city that changed from rural to metropolitan scale in a historical period signed by debates and contradictions.

Caracas is an accumulation of pieces. The radical transformation of the urban landscape, the speed of the growth and the discontinuity of the urban fabric, were consequence of the change of the national economic model and the adoption of proposed Modern theories. The violent process of growth started in the late 1920s with the death of the dictator Juan Vicente Gomez and the industrialization of the oil. The new political freedom and the earnings coming from the new economic model were the beginning of a striking progress. For a period of thirty years, from 1929 to 1959, Venezuela shift from an economy based on agro-industry to an industrial model based on exploitation of oil and other mineral resources. Caracas changed from rural to metropolitan scale. This process was reinforced by great migrations first from the countryside, and later from foreign countries, mainly from Spain, Italy, Portugal and finally Colombia and other Latin American countries. The process can be understood through different thematic periods.

The current conditions of the city is react on the concern of accessibility in terms of urban form, as major contributor to social inequalities. The work will address specifically two issues, in relation with current and future conditions: the impermeable limits between urban fragments and the current demand for space and infrastructure, therefore the need for intensification. Taking into consideration the need for pedestrian connections, public spaces and public transport, a mobility oriented strategy will be the way to address both issues: by increasing permeability the city will generate new possibilities for connections, movement and interaction. A metropolitan vision will open up the potential for larger public transport connections and networks of public spaces based on local scale urban operations. These local interventions will allow pedestrian connections to happen on the neighborhood scale, generating public spaces between communities through manageable projects with an impact on the local social dynamic and on the larger scale improving the accessibility of the city as a whole. The need for intensification will provide the program and the feasibility to support the set of concrete intervention acting as a driver for development, and, on the other hand the improvement of the areas will provide conditions to further densification.

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1.1 Looking for an ideal of a city that didn’t exist yet

The first half of the twentieth century was a period of great transformations in Venezuela transitions from rural to urban and industrial society, from agrarian to an industrial capitalist economy, and from authoritarian and liberal “caudillismo” to representative democracy and populist forms of governance.

1900-1935: From community to society
In the beginning of the twentieth century the economy of the country was based on agricultural exports mainly of coffee, sugar cane and cocoa. Caracas, since its foundation at 900 meters above sea level on the west side of a fertile valley, was not only an agricultural landscape but the center through which harvested product arrived from all around the country to the port of “La Guaira” for international trade. In that period Caracas hosted a mainly rural society with almost not great differentiation between the city and countryside. An emerging oil industry began to displace the agriculture industry as the major national economic power. The oil industry, by the time the most modern in the world, helped to consolidate the traditional autocratic government of Dictator Juan Vicente Gomez who exercised the power from Maracay, a provincial city 100 km from the capital. The oil based economy even if takes place

5 Therm that usually describes a political-military leader at the head of an authoritarian power.
6 Lorenzo Gonzalez Casas, “Modernity for import and export”.
As the valley has always regulated the growth of the city, natural elements such as topography, rivers and creeks also regulated the borders of the agricultural states or “haciendas”. These boundaries, have remained until now as the limits of most of the “urbanizations” that organized the suburban expansion (and today compose the modern city), are a response to topographic features rather than a strategy of urbanization. The pattern of expansion looked after the pre-existent natural features as well as the traces of the agricultural fields, irrigation systems and paths as guidelines for the new developments. The radical shift from one economic model to the other one, involved a reinterpretation of the agricultural fields, now obsolete in relation with the new economic driver. The agricultural activity was replaced by new programs, activities, buildings and strategies (from both private and public initiatives) in order to assume a new scale for the city.

in remote geographical areas, concentrated large amounts of capital in cities, this resulted in an exodus from the countryside to the cities and the emergence of new social sectors, such as “specialized working class” and “suburban citizens” a new social composition detached from the traditional agriculture landlords. This new social structure determined the first steps in the urban transformation of Caracas. The detached family house known as “La Quinta” was adopted as the leading typology, a sort of chalet in touch with the tropical landscape distant from the “townhouse” which represented the traditional urban typology. The influence of North American oil companies produces town landscapes and living standards very different from the traditional Hispanic ones. The conquest of the valley started with the out-migration of high-income inhabitants to new urban centers developed beyond the colonial limits. A new ideal of comfort based on imported goods mainly from The United States contributed to building a new suburban model, the washing machine, and other domestic products supported the comfort of the housing unit, while the car consolidated the suburban nature of the new “urbanizations”. The first suburban expansions towards the east were based on real estate strategies, as represents the starting point of a social economic segregation.

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One of the most representative “urbanizations” of this period is The Caracas Country Club, a residential district built in the late twenties over the land of the former “Hacienda Blandin”, as one of the first suburban extension of the city; the project was entirely developed in the United States, the architect Cliff Wendhack was the designer of the club house and the landscape was designed by the office of Frederick Law Olmsted. The complex was clearly designed following the parameters of the North American suburb, around golf courses, derivative from the “Garden-City” model. This fact confirms the influence of North American standards of living in a local rising modern society.

1936-1949: From village to city: importing modernity
Following the death of Juan Vicente Gomez in 1935, began a transitional period signed by deep changes in economic production, social organization and political systems. The political power is back to Caracas which counted 160,000 inhabitants. The new political scene is reflected on a new society that supports democracy and the will of progress. On the one hand the injection of capital from the oil industry allowed the government to invest in public works such as institutions, schools, universities and hospitals in order to provide services to their citizens and generate employment; in addition to this, large investments were made in infrastructure, following national plan of integration. On the other hand, the investment in the capital generated land speculation, produced mainly because of the lack of control from the government over a suburban model started few years before. This left a free way to promoters to push somehow towards an urban sprawl. New autonomous “urbanizations” with their own structure and fabric, dispersed along the valley, started to lead the process of extension. The “urbanizations” grew as rhizomes, branched along a main existing or new infrastructure, with now hierarchical subordination. By the end of the thirties some “urbanizations” were already built, tracing a new trend adopted by the elite and the emerging social classes. These peripheral settlements were car based structures independent from the city center, which was a Hispanic reticular mesh, starting a new logic of

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11 Philosophic theory used by Deleuze and Guatari to describe a model of organization based on the structure of some plants.
organization of the city. In this way the growth of Caracas was set definitely as a suburban structure that follows the linearity of the valley. The urban tissues that started to appear around the independent “urbanizations” were settled based on a principle of disaggregation, shaping new centers equivalent and independent from the original and interconnected through mobility infrastructure.

However, the expansion of Caracas was not an absolute act of private anarchy, some important developments from the public sector were key in the process, following important trends suggested by two “master plans”, within this plans an important debate around the city of the twentieth century took place. The first made on 1936 was oriented to the idea of continuity as the main pattern of a modern ideal. The Modern Movement proposed in a series of urban postulates which implied big changes in the cities. These architectonic and urban postulates, started to be tested in what appears to be the perfect ground, the “third world” and specially Latin America. Several young architects brought this new way of doing architecture and cities especially to those countries that were starting a process of modernization. According to this, parallel to first suburban developments of the thirties, certain “modern” attempts were made in the search for a “continuous” expansion of the city center. On a local scale, the re urbanization of “El Silencio” (1941-1945) by Carlos Raul Villanueva, transformed a piece of the city center into a social housing district, highlighting the importance of the traditional

12 Bernardo Secchi, ‘The modern city, the contemporary city and their future’
street as a generator of urban life in combination with the superimposition of functions and architectonic style that merges traditional elements with modern ideals. On a monumental scale, the “Rotival Plan”, by the French urban planner Maurice Rotival, proposed a monumental avenue that traced the growth of the center towards the east. The plan was not entirely built, but the main avenue known as “Avenida Bolivar” and the main architectonic ensemble “El Centro Simon Bolivar” (1950) which represents “the truly visual and urban modernity” 13 remain as some of the major modern legacies of the city later on the “Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas” by Carlos Raul Villanueva will become a masterpiece of the modern movement in Latin America, and a UNESCO world heritage. Some years after proposing the “Avenida Bolivar”, Maurice Rotival questioned himself about the need of building monumental avenues to a social class who prefer to live close to their own sport fields in the middle of gardens and parks. The question symbolically represented not only the acceptance, by the architect, of the suburban reality of a city under development, but the defeat of the modern idea of continuity to and early trend towards fragmentation, this was possibly the inflection moment between two antagonist paradigms.

The outbreak of the World War II brought the end of European intellectual influence. Venezuela’s traditional contact with European modernity, especially with the French version, was suddenly interrupted and replaced by North American influences. The impact of the modern American way of life among the wealthy elites and the middle class contributed to the building boom and the adoption of North American typologies. From this influence highlights the interest of entrepreneurs like Nelson Rockefeller in the modernization of Latin America. In the article “Modernity for import and export” by Lorenzo Gonzalez, stress the importance of modernization initiatives carried out by Nelson Rockefeller, which had an important effect on Caracas’ urban development and life-style. His initiatives contributed to the intervention of several international architects and planner in the city such as Wallace Harrison, Don Hatch and Robert Moses.

The growth of Caracas along with the surging automobile ownership had created serious traffic problems. The demand for expert advice, particularly in engineering, architecture and urban planning became increasingly evident. A traffic survey brought Robert Moses to Venezuela in 1948, initially requested to make recommendations about public transportation. His report, which included the work of six other consultants, emphasized the importance of creating a hierarchical street system to relieve traffic congestion as well as the need for an expressway connection between Caracas and La Guaira (the site of the capital sea port). Moses’ proposal corresponds to the basic lines of “Rotival Plan”, however instead of centering on the axis of “Avenida Bolivar”, Moses proposed a new structure

14 Lorenzo Gonzalez Casas, “Modernity for import and export”
of highways, three express ways featured cloverleaves instead the rotary intersections proposed in the “Rotival Plan”, parks and playgrounds replaced boulevards and squares. Rotival and Moses’ proposals separated by less than ten years express the noticeable shift in planning approaches, both belonging to contradictorily modern ideas; the monumentality of the avenue was replaced by hierarchical functionalism of the motorway, and the urban continuity by the suburban connectivity.

1950-1959: From city to metropolis: the total city.

In the beginning of the fifties Caracas counted 700,000 inhabitants. The political scenario is again under a military dictatorship leaded by the General Marcos Perez Jimenez, who ruled the country from 1950 to 1958. The totalitarian regime and the economic growth, combined with antagonist feelings of comfort and repression, provided the perfect scenario to test the ideas of the modern movement. Reciprocally the functionalism and rationality of the modern movement provided the perfect language for an autocratic urban image that sacrificed populism for international notoriety. This period represents the years of “metropolization” of Caracas, the era of television, mass culture, infrastructure networks and mass construction. Consolidated the post war era, Caracas became a western reference for the new prosperity. In addition to immigrants from Europe and America, migrants from the countryside began to flood into the city in one of the most abrupt rural-to-urban migrations in Latin American history. The sudden growth in importance and heterogeneity transformed Caracas into an “instant metropolis”.

On the same line of approach made couple of year before by Robert Moses, the second “master plan” was proposed in 1951, suggesting a polycentric model, mainly achieved by the motorways, which have become important representations of the formal and spatial character of Caracas, giving to the city a relative condition of connectivity. The plan of 1951 recognized for the first time the existence of the metropolitan area as an entity. Caracas started to grow as a sum of parts, de-linked
developing of a city that couldn’t respond effectively. Despite public attempts to hold the newcomers, the violent increase of the population forced the new inhabitants to occupy vacant land, in most of the cases not suitable for construction. Based on self-construction houses, this process of informal urbanization have been, progressive and systematically, transforming natural land of low real estate value into urban land in sectors which is not allowed to build because the potential risk that it represents.

By middle of the fifties, the physical limits of the valley started to challenge the growth, the scarcity of flat land, already filled by 30 years of suburbanization, pushed the developers to build on mountainous sites in the South, suitable for construction. During this second stage of growth, the pattern of the settlements started to be more irregular following the lines of the topography. In the meanwhile, large waves of immigration arrive to the city from the countryside looking for better opportunities, pressing the
Informal settlements built on hills represented a “visual manifesto of poverty”. A public strategy called “war against the slum” was used as a political propaganda, however it represented a new source of employment and the introduction of a new architecture more progressist and social\(^\text{20}\). Large sums of money were invested in the construction of social housing districts following the image of modernistic new towns influenced by the CIAM principles as the idealistic and pragmatic answer to population growth and poverty, a sort of “urban utopia”. The “super blocks” were the evidence of the new modern scale, their large dimensions follow by the hygienic discourse were seen as the answer to the past and the poverty and a hypothesis for the future\(^\text{21}\). The structure of a working-class city superimposed over the traditional city was a formula repeated in several locations along the city. The most representative of these developments due also to the symbolic role and turbulent history is a large the housing project designed by Carlos Raul Villanueva and promoted by the government of the General Marcos Perez Jimenez, originally named “2 de Diciembre”, after the day the dictator came to power. The project was designed for 55,000 inhabitants and 8,206 dwellings, built in three phases between 1955 and 1957. The plan has a very rigid modernistic design based on Le Corbusier’s Unite d Habitation, with hierarchically-placed superblocks, lower apartment blocks and clearly defined infrastructure and facilities. When the works were almost concluded, at the beginning of 1958, a general uprising against the dictatorship began and Perez Jimenez fled the country on January 23. From that day on, the housing project was squatted by the poor, mainly immigrants from the countryside, who came to the city looking for a better future. The name of the housing project changed to “23 de Enero”, signaling the start of a roaring revolutionary. The squatting started with the superblocks followed by the informal urbanization of the public spaces in between the blocks hosting a large amount of population. Based on self-organization, the squatted new town has its own social structures; the inhabitants have organized their own services.

21 Ibid.
In the following decades, the modernistic new towns of this generation around the world were blamed of becoming ghettos, for the existences of social and cultural difficulties and the contribution to social segregation. The restructuring of these housing developments often results in demolishing and rebuilding them again. The Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis (U.S) was one of the first large demolitions of modernistic architecture; the high-profile failure became an emblematic icon, its destruction in 1972, 16 years after the construction was finished, was claimed by Charles Jenks as “the end of modernity”. In the particular case of Caracas, the failure of the modern “urban utopia” was evidenced not by symbolic demolitions, but by the immediate “informalization” of the “modern spaces”. The confrontation between planned and un-planned structures in districts like “23 de Enero” (former “2 de Diciembre”), “Unidad Vecinal Simón Rodriguez” and “Propatria”, represented the manifold relations, ambiguities and contradictions between autocratic planned structures and the social and cultural reception and reaction to these ideals which manifests itself in additions, alterations or rejections by local inhabitants and other “non-professionals”.

What happened to the modernistic housing districts can be seen as a small-scale metaphor of what happened to Caracas in those years. The quest to achieve a metropolitan scale, in a period of ideals that intended to shape the city and the society through distant formal principles, contributed to the development of the city that with its highways and avenues, and its modern monumental architecture, accomplished for a short period of time, an idealistic metropolitan image. But almost immediately, the effects of being a metropolis did not leave this image intact. The city was about to face the results of a confrontation of extremes; extreme top-down developments driven by public projects and real estate speculation and extreme bottom-up developments through spontaneous urbanization by those left in the margins of planning.

The modern housing project designed by Carlos Raul Villanueva and promoted by the government of the General Marcos Perez Jimenez, originally named ‘2 de Diciembre’. In the January 23 of 1958, as soon as the construction was finished, the housing project was squatted by the poor. Since then name of the housing project changed to ‘23 de Enero’.

1.2 Confrontation of extremes: The Metropolitan Fact

A new shift in the political scenario from military dictatorship to democracy followed by high rates of economic growth and low inflation will accelerate the urbanization of Caracas to unprecedented levels. The population tripled in just 20 years and the metropolitan ambitions became a metropolitan fact.

1960-1983: Dream of progress

With a new democratic political structure signed by the alternation of power by two political parties, a new era of progress started. The nationalization of oil and basic industries and the creation of OPEC, together with the increase in the prices of hydrocarbons allowed high levels of economic growth, the deepening of industrialization and import substitution. Investment in public works and installation of commercial and service activities ended with the agro-export economy. In urban terms, this prosperity allowed access to the people of Caracas to goods and services and boost the commercial expansion from the city center to new developments in the east and west, reinforcing the structure based on different centralities distant from each other. Business centers, supermarkets, shopping malls and petrol stations became the scene of public life. A new society driven by comfort and “tropical glamour” demanded investments in culture art and entertainment, as it moves at high speeds on private vehicles. Caracas became a city of flows.
the eighties, in addition to the economic prosperity, lead to a construction boom. Mainly promoted by private investment and the boom of horizontal property, the real estate market transformed Caracas in a city of apartments. The anarchic sprawl provoked a new way of dealing with the problems of the city through direct intervention on the part of local authorities, this into the creation of ministries and institutions to promote urban and territorial plans in order to prevent and guide the uncontrollable expansion. The designation of protected natural areas, the promotion of satellite cities and the redistribution of activities were some of the strategies implemented as a reference to London, Paris and Moscow’s strategies. The idea of creating a “green belt” to give a framework for the metropolis gave as a result the declaration of the Avila Mountain (the main of the valley) as National Park in the north and the Protected Zone of the Metropolitan Area. Both areas drew a thick ring of open space that surrounded the metropolitan area. Avila was able to stay partially empty, but the protective zone was filled with formal and informal urban activities. In the meanwhile new cities promoted by the state appeared beyond the green limits, nowadays dormitory towns that compose the metropolitan region. Caracas began to acquire “macrocephalic” conditions, concerned about that, the authorities pushed regional developing plans, achieving major works in infrastructure and industrialization in other regions of the country. In the meanwhile, totally in the margins of real state dynamics, un-planned urbanization kept occupying progressively vacant land. By this moment the urban fabric of Caracas has appropriated all the natural and non-protected areas inside and in the periphery of the city. Furthermore, the compactness and the spatial conflicts between “urbanizations”, is evidenced, in particular, in the informal settlements inside the urban fabric. Their condition of not being peripheral and being inside the urban fabric, locate them in the borders between

24 Ibid.
26 The macrocephaly is a phenomenon that occurs in countries whose urban network is very unbalanced by the predominance of a large city that hosts a large part of the urban population.
1983-2000: Institutional Crisis

While the first 20 years of democracy marked the peak of economic growth and urban development, the period between 1983 and 1999 represents a slow and painful collapse, characterized by institutional crisis, corruption and social upheaval.

By 1983 Caracas had around 3 million inhabitants. This year represents the highest point of “urban celebration” and the point when the structures started to fall down. The society already used to the refinements of the metropolis and with strong metropolitan ambitions, demanded investments in culture, art and entertainment. New public buildings with innovative architectural style more close to postmodern standards than to the modern hip of the fifties were being built in order to fit these demands. Some of them were completed with success and some of them were never finished. The “Teresa Carreño” Theater, one of the biggest theaters in Latin America was inaugurated in 1983, the “Caño Amarillo” Cultural Complex and the “Foro Libertador” remain uncompleted. The same year, the first phase of what is considered one the last “well done” public work was put into operation. The “Metro de Caracas” did a step forward to the integration of the metropolis, creating new possibilities of connection and social interaction through a modern system of underground public transport, characterized by the quality of the service and the spatial attributes of the stations. Apart from the development of infrastructure, there was also a significant growth in cultural activities and events, which marked a period of cultural blossoming in Caracas.

While the world was re-evaluating the architecture and urbanism principles of the modern movement, the inhabitants of Caracas were living a dream of progress confronted with unexpected chaotic results. The perfect portrait of the metropolis of the fifties became a postmodern collage of highways and slums, with an iconography based on billboards, shopping centers and anonymous dwelling towers.

“urbanizations”, which are natural topographic boundaries (often the limits of the former agricultural states) that were never considered as a point of dialogue between, at the time, new developments and today are places in the margins of any urban and spatial policy.
from its advantages of transport, it was also an important agent for urban renewal in some key locations of the city, using the expropriations and demolitions as an opportunity for creation of new public spaces. Maybe the most powerful intervention was the transformation of “Calle Real de Sabana Grande” into a commercial boulevard exclusive for pedestrians, becoming one of the most important public spaces in Caracas. The “Metro de Caracas” was able to provide a new face to the metropolitan condition featured by vitality and multiplicity.

The same year, a historical “Black Friday” for the first time knocked out the bases of a growing economy completely dependent on the oil industry. This economic crisis was interpreted as the failure of an almost finished political administration close to be substituted. Some weak measures were taken, followed by controls and diverse scandals. Since then an increasing economic and institutional crisis touched every aspect of Caracas’ society. The crisis triggered the abandonment of clear policies and urban plans that with the corrupted manipulations of private companies generated large dense projects, detached from the city structure of services, public space and transport networks with negative results for urban development. The total occupation of plane land in the valley and adjacent hills resulted in low density zones served by the main network of infrastructure (resulting from the plan in 1951) and peripheries with extreme densities area of Caracas. Projects such as “Juan Pablo II” insist on a densification of the suburb which represents the new image of an urban model paradoxically suburban. The first suburban expansions of the thirties and forties now occupy what is considered the central part of the city. The transport infrastructure is feeding these low density developments while new dense suburban developments remain on isolated areas detached from the urban daily life. The original individual housing typology “La Quinta” that first started to colonize de valley within suburban “Garden-City” structures is now denying a fully urbanized territory as well as the new apartment blocks are doing from. This situation not only reinforces the original fragmented physical structure of the city, but also promotes exclusion, segregation and the increase of inequalities on an urban environment of anguish, congestion and social tension.

The social upheaval of 1989, caused by the announcement of drastic economic reforms, is remember as the worst massacre of Venezuelan history becoming the most representative historical event of the violent decline of the political, economic and social structures. As a reaction to this event, two failed military insurgences destabilized the political structures signed by corruption scandals. Some years later a program of adjustments for the financial sector initiated a boom in the constructions of glass office towers of diverse shapes and styles. The economic measures ended up causing of a bank crisis hitting the already damaged national economy. Some projects became financial white elephants and were reclaimed by squatters transforming skyscrapers in vertical slums.

The collapse of public and private institutions as a consequence of an illusion of progress financed by a vulnerable oil economy is symbolically represented by premature ruins of the symbols of progress than in other periods composed the desires image Caracas. The state of neglect of the public works of the fifties and sixties, the remains of the unfinished works of the eighties and the squatted office buildings of the nineties, compose Caracas’ metropolitan image of end of twentieth century.

1.3 Destruction of precedents: a contemporary tabula rasa

In 70 years Caracas turned from an urban to rural, then from a dispersed city, to a dense, polycentric and compact metropolitan. With a population of 4.2 million inhabitants in the metropolitan area, Caracas has now a contemporary metropolis. Today, as a consequence of a process of urbanization grounded on political confrontations, unstable economies and intellectual debates, half of the national population lives in ‘un-planned’ settlements, which mean the half of the national population of 128 cities along the country. Demographic studies show that only in Caracas, 56% of the people (2.700.000 inhabitants) live ‘un-planned’ settlements. According to this, 15 million people living in more than 3 million self-constructed houses, over 140.000 hectares of territory. These numbers basically evidence the vulnerability of a nation where the safety of more than the half of the entire population is hanging by a thread.

By the end of the nineties, the former Lieutenant Hugo Chavez emerged as a populist answer against the old political system in crisis, already obsolete and corrupt. Chavez came to public awareness in the early nineties when in two occasions attempted to seized the power by force through failed military revolts. In 1999, through democratic elections, a self-styled revolutionary regime led by Chavez assumed power as a symbol against an old political class who had led the country from the pinnacle of progress to an unprecedented political, economic and...
social crisis. Therefore, the answer implied a complete break up with the precedent system, not only politically but also socially and culturally, interrupting a continuity of the history in a sort of absolute tabula rasa. The ten years of government have been dedicated to eliminate every structure linked with past governments and establishing a whole national system from scratch, based on socialist ideals financed by oil export economy, the engine of the neoliberal capitalist global system. The new government declared that its objective is to construct the “socialism of the twenty-first century”. The first years of this government did not take significant measures on urban issues, on the contrary, the early years were marked by abandonment; the symbols of progress from other periods turned into ruins, iconic buildings, urban art works, public spaces and infrastructure were increasingly showing signs of deterioration and vandalism. The spontaneous collapse of one of the bridges of the highway connecting Caracas to La Guaira, one of the most important infrastructure projects in Latin America in the fifties, was perhaps the strongest evidence of this state of neglect.

But if anything characterizes the urban impact of the “Bolivarian Revolution” has been the lack of effective measures to face a housing crisis, gained from the previous decades, and taken to extremes by the natural disasters. The pressure on the state to respond to this crisis has pushed to urban expansion projects that do not contribute to an ongoing project of the city, but rather carried to extremes the existing fragmented and segregated urban structure.

1999 – 2010: Last episode of growth, The Socialist Cities
Venezuela is geographically located in an area susceptible to natural disasters. The earthquakes are one of the biggest potential risks in Venezuela in terms of human and economic losses. Currently 80% of the population lives in areas of high seismic threat. The risk increases as the demographic rate rises without real urban policies. On the other hand, the rate of heavy rain due to the tropical storms generated in the Caribbean Sea caused every year several mudslides, slope collapse, flooding and thousands of victims. In December 1999, only few months after the government of Hugo Chavez started, occurred what is considered the worst natural disaster in Venezuela of the twentieth century. A big set of mudslides, landslides and flooding took place along the Caribbean coast, especially tragic in the Vargas state. Thousands of people were displaced and entire villages were devastated. The called “Vargas tragedy” affected from 25% to 35% of the population all around the country, loses around four billion dollars, more than 500,000 people without
access to safe drinking water for several days, causing disease outbreaks, nearly 100,000 injured, and around 50,000 deaths according to the Red Cross figures.

The magnitude of the tragedy took the national government by surprise, despite the alarming amount of water falling all over the country since two weeks before the event and the several alerts send by different organizations. The rescue of the survivors began relatively late, few days after the tragedy. The response to the emergency was totally taken over by the state, in what was the first major task of the newly established government in terms of urban planning matters. The strength of an autocratic and powerful state was able to reject any initiative coming from other sectors of the nation, even proposals for new urban development coming from the academic sector, after months of negotiations, were rejected. The reconstruction of the basic infrastructure, counted with the participation of the army, and was concluded with relative success, above all because the participation of the resident population in a sort of bottom-up strategy. On the other hand, relocation was quite unfortunate. A number of “new cities” were built at the margin of some of the main cities across the country, almost completely disconnected from the urban fabric, mono functional and without adequate public facilities, were offered as an option to the displaced population dispersed on the national territory. Places without any link with the places of origin, people were suddenly completely disconnected from their familiar, social and productive environment. These urban developments have become ghost towns and marginal ghettos in few years, most of the people resettled in these areas moved shortly to places where they would have the opportunity to join a productive chain, invading available land and creating new informal settlements, on top of the millions already existing in Venezuela. In a few words a natural tragedy becoming the new explosion of the city. Ten years after, the people still suffering the consequences; an effective plan of reconstruction never took place neither a strategy for the relocation of the displaced. Some of the infrastructure was rebuilt but most of the damaged area still destroyed. Thousands of people never came back, most of them where simply abandoned by governmental policies and relocation plans. Nowadays the displaced of the tragedy have built new informal settlements in the outskirts of Caracas and other zones around the country.

The events of 1999 is an evidence of the vulnerability of a nation, caused not only by a natural disaster, but even worst, by poor urban policies and the almost non existing emergency plan to react in case of a calamity. After facing the numbers of the people living in extreme risk and evidencing the consequences of a natural disaster, is compulsory to think about the social responsibility of urban planning and architecture.

Eleven years later a new disaster hit Venezuelan territory. During the last couple of months of 2010, several areas in the north of Venezuela were affected by a heavy rain phenomenon known as “La Niña”, the worst event since the tragedy of 1999. Once again turning out in thousands of people affected, more than 90,000 people were displaced 32, damaged infrastructure, fully isolated villages and urban areas and millions of dollars in losses; and once again this event highlighted the ineffectiveness of the Government to meet the demand for dignified houses for a population in risk, but also put again under public discussion, the housing crisis affecting Venezuela through the last years. The housing accumulated deficit doubled in the last 10 years from 900,000 when the government of Hugo Chavez to more almost 2 million houses33. The average of houses built by the Government in the past 11 years is of 25,000 per year, more than the half of the yearly average built between 1958 and 1998). In 11 years the government built around 300,000 houses. These figures and the presidential rhetoric are an evidence of political failure 34.

The recent loss of popularity of the Government has generated anguish to the state regarding the 2012 presidential elections. Many factors demonstrate the political failure and without a

32 Source: El Universal, “Afectados por lluvias en el país se elevan a más de 90,000”, December 6th 2010, Caracas.
doubt the housing figures are some of the most evident. The pressure on the state to show responses in this aspect has led it to take desperate measures. In the beginning of 2011 the government announced the construction of 2 million houses between 2011 and 2017, which means more than 300,000 houses per year, almost the same amount of houses built in total since 1999. As starting point, 150,000 houses will be built only in 2011, with an investment of 4.700 million euros.

The omnipotence of a state, with high economical resources, thanks to a total control that exerts on the oil industry, allow it to invest in once large sums of money, on fast track housing projects in order to reach the figures in short political periods, without the need to include policies or strategies that contribute to effective urban developments. Projects such as “Chief Tiuna first stage”, “Caribia Socialist city” and “Terrazas del Alba”, are being built in the environs of Caracas, on isolated available land which does not belong to a collective imaginary, close to a national infrastructure, highway or road, but completely unlinked with existing urban fabrics. The projects itself, as those built after the Vargas tragedy, are mono functional, sterile and generic with no identity built around them, only connected by car infrastructure to the urban settlements, usually with a bus line, but no chance for pedestrian relations.

For instance the urban development “Chief Tiuna”, as is described by the press department of the Ministry of Public works and Housing, is one of the works executed by the Bolivarian Government in the framework of the “Caracas Plan”, in order to build homes for the population of the country, which at the same time will stimulate creating space focusing on the community bound for the revolutionary socialism. The first phase of this work (...) consists of 440 apartments distributed in 22 buildings of 5 floors each, on 52 hectares under a fresh and lush climate, including the integration of urban facilities for the new social - productive development of the beneficiary families. The investment cost is 117.620.134 Bs. (27.353.519 USD). Each building has four apartments per floor of 70 square meters, distributed in room, dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms and two bathrooms. Unlike the housing built in previous efforts, the
Bolivarian Government is interested not only in the creation of houses, but in the formation of a Socialist commune in them, with all the services and the ability to supply food and provide work to part of its residents. For this reason the community has: A pre-school for 350 children, a carpentry semi industrial and Socialist (...); an area of crops (...); a processing plant of plastic (...); the recovery of a nursery with the introduction of 20,086 ornamental plants expected to serve as a company of gardening, well same incorporation of social and recreational areas; and a bus line, which offers transportation from and to the Metro station “La Rinconada” from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.”

The Caracas Plan does not seem to follow a clear strategy for urban growth that involves the city as a whole. This is evidenced by the very nature of projects and interventions announced publicly through the media, where is never specifically mentioned a plan, but isolated projects promoted in different ways. The construction of new housing developments detached

35 Ministry of Public works and Housing, “Conozca el complejo de viviendas Cacique Tiuna en la Rinconada”, YVKE mundial, June 11th 2009, Caracas.

Press releases of foreign investments in housing developments and announcements of expropriations
Source: El Universal, Noticias 24 and Globovisión
from existing urban structures, are announced randomly without a clear overall strategy. Many of these developments arise as a result of international agreements and are financed by countries such as China, Byelorussia and Turkey, subject to the government’s diplomatic agenda. Others are developed separately by private developers, driven by capitalist profit making, and then offered to the state which guarantees the purchase before the project is completed, ensuring profits to the promoter companies. The lack of planning is most evident in the interventions within the city. The strategy is based on expropriation of land and buildings and “organized squats”, promoted directly by the presidency of the republic through national television, without prior consideration to the owners and without the participation of local authorities such as mayors and governors, in order to enable the implementation of a real plan.

The problem lies on the fact that the need of reaching certain figures is not taking into considerations the urban implications attached to these numbers. In an open debate organized by the Institute of Urbanism of the Central University of Venezuela on February 2011 around the current housing crisis in Venezuela, the architect and writer Marco Negron expressed his critical position towards the urban policies taken by the national government. He argues that term ‘Twenty-first Century Socialism’ is no more than an authoritarian regime with a community project of personal mastery, which implies absolute control of the society. The new urban developments (also called ‘Socialist Cities’) are seen as an urban reflection of this way of governance. The problem of the housing is a problem of the city. There is no plan for the city attached to the construction of the large number of houses that is being taking place. According to Marco Negron, the political electoral system prevails over the urbanism, where politics do not follow plans and plans are not supported by projects.

The consequences of this type of development, beyond spatial or formal, are social. This kind of strategy rather to contribute to solve the situation will reinforce social inequalities. In the text “The rich and the poor: three traditions in modern western urbanism”, Bernardo Secchi maintain that spatial devices, usually designed by architects and urban planners, have relevant consequences on the social inequality. In this sense, the north-American suburb and the north and south-American gated communities, become a consolidated tradition of separation, exclusion and even for social alienation. This model is usually a product of a middle high class populist image, within a marketing strategy, where the theme of safety and quality of environment become the bases in the creation of a new exclusive society36. What is ironic is that these new developments in Venezuela, are promoted, design and built by the state, oriented to the low-income householders to whom, as a consequence, the city somehow has been denied. These social enclaves become tools to alienate, to create new social organizations, in the margin of the social dynamics of the city itself, with specific forms of governance, as the traditional gated communities, but promoted by policies of division and control, based on political ideologies. Unfortunately, the money, resources and efforts of these initiatives are ignoring future consequences. The potential behind these projects could transform them in real engines for a radical improvement of the existing city. Despite some future second and third phases of construction, there is not much more what this kind of projects can tell about their future possibilities. As the urban planning in the Modern Movement, which are heirs, these projects are conceived as final and definite objects, where the study of the city becomes the study of block, of the possibilities of different configurations following a single pattern 37, not flexible to further modifications. As long as this growth model is perpetuated, based on turning our backs on each other, society itself will continue turning its back. Caracas needs to turn towards the public, creating an environment that allow citizen integration, based on urban operations, facilities and service networks which effectively take care of the needs of each citizen. It is the free encounter of the individual and the collective, where we can produce a “new society”, thus strengthening diversity as the symbol of a collective identity.

36 Bernardo Secchi, ‘The rich and the poor: three traditions in modern urbanism’
37 Bernardo Secchi, ‘The modern city, the contemporary city and their future’
Part 1 / History of Growth

1.4 A reference to the contemporary city

Grand ideas of city building in the twentieth century have become tarnished by reputation for over-ambition, social injustice and financial disaster. The contemporary cities are the result of the test and failures of these ideals, emerged in periods of dramatic expansions with not clear pictures of the future, but with the conviction of being able to predict and to control the realities to come. Today we are confronting a period where most of the population of the world lives in cities, which are becoming so big that there is almost impossible to recognize them, where the social structures overlaid with a great amount of different urban patterns. Therefore, is impossible to come with totalitarian ideals built around single models in a sort of unique way of solving problems, there is no place for the modern “urban utopia”. Nowadays the complexity of cities needs flexible innovations, oriented to understand the particularities of each problem, more attached to specific physical, social and cultural contexts. In a global world where differences are the unifying structure, single models should not be imposed. What Venezuela is living is an ideological reverse based on failed ideals. The way to fight against predator liberal economies is not going back, is to innovate understanding the current needs and the future threats of society.

The Venezuelan new urban developments (or ‘Socialist Cities’) have a lot in common with the post-war urban reconstruction projects that took place in Europe and then also in The United States following modernist planning and design ideologies.

These models asserted strong interventionist powers for the state and professionals. The economic systems prevailing at the moment were the Keynesian mixed economy model in capitalist societies and the centrally planned socialist models in Russia, Eastern Europe and China, both of them assigned a proactive role to the state in the face of markets and market failures. Nowadays the neo liberal economic global system reduces responsibilities of governments and enlarges those of business and communities in order to facilitate competitions and development of markets. This economic context, reflect a shift in urban planning models, master plans changed into a more flexible strategic planning style. According to this logic is quite easy to understand why the “Socialist Cities” were chosen as the urban model for the current government, a socialist oriented government with an anti-capitalism rhetoric able to control the national economy by controlling the industry of oil. An economy based on a global capitalistic market of resources, enables the finance of a political project in an ideological context of the middle of twentieth century. Caracas, despite ideological contradictions, with an on-going growth, already overcome old paradigms and now faces the complexity of the contemporary city that cannot be addressed under unique failed models. The “Socialist Cities” as a model of growth is repeating old mistakes. The detachment from the existing city is pushing into extremes the suburban structure of the city, increasing the problems of accessibility; furthermore, the totalitarian typologies of standards behind every development denies diversity, fostering major problems of exclusion and social segregation. The quest is for realistic projects oriented to solve specific problems but being able at the same time to refer to a wider urban vision, highlighting the importance of the context and the cultural background. The contemporary urban approach, rather than to impose a totalizing model, must reinforce the character of the place as a starting point for social integration, accepting that society should not be seen through the filter of standardization, because what is increasingly characterizing the contemporary society is diversity and cultural mix.

39 Ibid.
Many superimposed historical factors, such as the influence of modern ideas; the lack of control of the state over the suburbanization of the city; the pre-existing territorial and agricultural patterns; the overlay of a dominant macro-scale network of avenues and highways; finally the promotion of the city by three different sectors, the private, the public and the informal self-construction, not always in correct dialogue with each other; have been the main causes of this fragmented combination of different urban typologies. The confrontation between fragments has structural and physical manifestations that contribute to the lack of accessibility which has led to strong inequalities. The restricted access to basic services, public facilities, urban dynamics, public interaction between social sectors, and therefore accessibility to opportunities, often promotes social segregation. The increase the breach between rich and poor incite an atmosphere of urban tension, that joined with other political and economic issues generate insecurity and violence, deeply affecting the quality of life for all citizens.
2.1 The Problem: Spatial traces of (sub) urban ideals

The persistent “suburban ideal” behind every episode of urban growth of Caracas underlines three main characteristics, on which this work will focus, as causes of the accessibility issues currently affecting the city and impeding the effective growth that Caracas will face in the coming years.

On one hand, the car based structure in which the expansion of Caracas was grounded from the very beginning have been progressively denying the public space and pedestrian connections, rejecting in most cases possible points of contact between citizens. As a consequence, certain areas can only be reached by private cars; the lack of access becomes an abuse against freedom, if we consider walking as the truly expression of freedom in terms of urban flows.

On the other hand, un-balanced densities as a result of the early occupation of the central valley by “urbanizations” or low density suburban developments, hinders the growth from the “inside” and promoted the urban expansion as an easier way to deal with population growth, justifying the densification of the periphery in the eighties, detached from the main infrastructural of communication and urban facilities, and stimulating the remoteness of the “Socialist Cities” of today. The pockets of low density along the main infrastructure set the expansion of the city in the form of dense and isolated fragments removed from
Furthermore, the lack of interaction and separation, mainly in the central valley, is reinforced by the unexpected physical combination of urban forms product of the rough encounters between fragments. These encounters have become "impermeable barriers" that interrupt the spatial continuity of the city, blocking pedestrian connections and challenging the accessibility to certain areas. This stimulates social differences that end up excluding (or often self-excluding) social groups.

Car based city
The public squares were replaced by the shopping centres and the traditional street of the central valley is now a congested and occupied individually by cars. The streets of the periphery are mono-functional and that do not allow pedestrian distances, this facts made some areas dependent on private cars or public transport which do not cover the entire surface of the city.

The map of land use distribution (Figure 1), shows that the greatest concentration of land use different than the purely residential use is primarily located along the east-west axis over which the linear structure of the central valley is organized,
leaving a mono-functional peripheral area. By looking at the proportions of land use (Figure 2) we can notice that the public space is less than 6% percent of the urban area, which means 0.005 m² per capita. In contrast, the residential land use occupies the 72% of the total urban area. On the other hand, the land projected as public spaces mainly corresponds to natural protected areas or parks that tend to not be fully integrated with the urban fabric (Figure 3). This distribution makes difficult to set up a network of public spaces that allow the pedestrian to move freely through the entire city.

Regarding the distribution of public transport, the Figure 4 indicates that the highest density of transport networks, which includes the four subway lines, is also concentrated on the east-west axis of the central valley, and along the axis of the secondary valleys that come out from the main one. The rest of the city is served by bus networks, often spontaneously organized and unable to provide adequate service. Figure 5 shows those isolated areas lacking of public transport service, the accessibility to these areas depends exclusively on the use of private vehicles. These areas are mostly mono-functional and therefore do not provide opportunities of employment or public services to their inhabitants. The people are forced to move to distant places every day, increasing congestion and excluding an important part of the population from the daily citizen life. While most of these isolated fragments are located on peripheral zones, in the central valley can be found similarly remote areas despite the proximity from the highest concentration of infrastructure, services and urban facilities.

Un-balanced densities

In a conversation, published in book “Santiago de Leon de Caracas”, between the architects William Niño Araque and Tomas Sanabria, both very knowledgeable about the reality of Caracas, mutually agree that within the existing city there is potential for densification in order to balance the growth, arguing that there are many voids able that support services and higher densities. Alternatively, the architect and writer Marco Negron, in an interview published in the same book, argues that there is a myth that makes us believe that Caracas live more inhabitants
In reality, despite the low density housing that characterize some areas of the central zone, the concentration of activities of the center of the valley attracts every day a large number of people living in the periphery and the “dormitory towns” of the metropolitan area. It is estimated that approximately one million people come to Caracas every day from satellite cities such as Guarenas - Guatire, San Antonio - Los Teques and the valleys of the River Tuy, causing congestion and often the collapse of the urban infrastructures.

The Figure 6 and Figure 7, according to data provided by the metropolitan municipality, show how peripheral areas accommodate high densities, underlining in this case popular and poor areas like “El Valle - Coche” in the south-west, “Petare” in the east and “Las minas de Baruta” in the south-east. On the contrary, some areas of the central valley have low densities. This is the case of “Chacao”, the wealthier municipality of the metropolitan area, which includes several “urbanizations” from the thirties and forties such as “Altamira”, “Los Palos Grandes” and “The Caracas Country Club” organized around golf courses.
In contrast with the population density, the Figure 8 shows that the Central Valley has the highest concentration of employment of Caracas, pointing out the historical center and the municipality of “Chacao” as the major urban poles of attraction. These data certainly corresponds with the distribution of uses and public transport shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

**Impermeable Barriers**

As has been already described in several occasions, Caracas is a discontinuous city. The discontinuities are due in principle to the fragmented growth model driven by the real estate market that selected “the best land” to develop isolated residential districts (“urbanizations”), leaving aside the land less suitable for construction such as streams and slopes. As the city grew, the spaces left aside went progressively urbanizing not always following a planned strategy able to deal with existing urbanized fragments. Many of these lands were occupied by self-construction settlements, underlining the settlements on hills in the periphery, and the settlements on top of the streams in the Central Valley. Focusing on the area of Central Valley, the discontinuity becomes even more evident (Figure 9). The topography is not as rough as in the periphery but nevertheless the slight geographical differences that shape the Central Valley became barriers that abruptly interrupt the continuity of the city (Figure 10).

These geographical patterns always had a limit condition. In the agricultural past, the streams draining the valley constituted...
property boundaries between agriculture estates ("Haciendas") that were later urbanized, keeping somehow these limits between them. Today, these streams pass almost unnoticed, turning into virtual lines that along their path become barriers of various kinds. Sometimes linear informal settlements that suddenly become urban voids or walls that divide different properties. Some patches of urban fabrics are often attached to these virtual lines; residential fragments, informal settlements, green areas or industrial clusters arranging large blocks that impede the connections on either side (Figure 11). These barriers abruptly fragment almost the entire valley mainly on the east-west direction, creating different degrees of accessibility to intermediate fragments. The Figure 12 shows in dark those patches that have less access. If we compare this map with Figure 1 we realize that those fragments with the worst conditions correspond to the mono-functional areas lacking of variety of uses. Despite the proximity, the physical barriers confined to a state of isolation some areas that may well be part of the urban dynamics.
2.2 The Arguments

Fragmentation and Permeability

Paolo Gasparini is known in Caracas as the first great photographer of the city. He has portrayed Caracas since the fifties and today his photographs are considered historical documents of the capital. In an interview for the magazine “Estampas” in 2010, he was asked if he would buy a postcard of Caracas, which he will choose, replying, “one of The Avila without any doubt”. The Avila is the highest mountain that limits the valley in the north and is the main natural protected area of the city. The curious thing about Gasparini’s response is that, for a photographer who has been the creator of the most widespread images of the great architectural icons that have marked the evolution of the city, recognizes after all that the identity of Caracas is still being built around a landscape icon that has always been there, and not to the urban structure itself. Caracas’ fragmented condition (physical, social and functional) has not succeeded to create a totaling identity that includes all citizens; each piece of the city has its own identity and its own iconography that responds to the local. If there is a common feature that involves the city as a whole in that of diversity and multiplicity, therefore is worthless to pretend that a city, that is a patchwork quilt, have the same homogeneous reading in its built fabric, as cities like Paris or Barcelona, because that is not part of its character and its identity 40.

This condition is a quality attributed to the contemporary city as such, where the main feature is not continuity but fragmentation.

The city is made by different pieces morphologically and typologically different. The differentiation and the separateness of the parts is its unique constructive character, organization and legibility41. To oppose the pattern of continuity becomes the quest for permeability. The objective is, by working with public spaces on local urban operations, to build links and partial continuities giving possibilities for spatial and social interrelation between different fragments. Planning must pay attention to the complex ways in which fragments could connect with each other, in order to create environments that allow citizen integration. By underlining latent networks in the existing urban tissue, an “urban sewing” can incorporate a series of urban devices able to transform urban barriers into porous tissues.

“To overcome the exclusion it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive program of recovery and creation of public spaces that assist the development of an undivided citizenship; public transport systems to democratize accessibility; cultural facilities to promote free thought; institutional headquarters to

41 Bernardo Secchi, “The modern city, the contemporary city and their future”
Parallel strategies

Large-scale urban plans are often associated with the concept of "master plan" which generally gives a final image of a project that is rarely fully realized. Some initial idea may be valuable to change negative perceptions or mobilize attention, but the preliminary concept may have little relation to what is finally produced. The long-term major projects are susceptible to various changes in the political, economic and administrative spheres that promote the project. The lack of continuity and clarity of objectives in large-scale planning often ends in failure, creating bigger problems. Failures can occur not only when projects are unconcluded or exceed assigned budgets but also when the focus of the project is too strongly centered on short-term profitability or on extracting short-term political visibility. In Venezuela, the polarization and political conflict have hindered the planning and formulation of large-scale projects that transcend electoral periods. The desire to remain in power and ensure elections has fostered the abandonment of projects with no guarantee of continuity. In this context, urban projects have been confused with electoral political projects ("Socialist Cities" for instance).

This work proposes a densification strategy that relies on a reconstruction of the network of streets and avenues through small-scale projects generating new spatial relationships that allow the holder a new public transport route to act as backup for densification and change. This implies a strategy promoted in parallel from two opposite scales, local and metropolitan. Accordingly, despite having a metropolitan vision, the plan does not involve a mega project of transformation. By contrast, the change is driven from independent localized projects, which involve improvements in the fine-grained of the neighborhood. This means that change can be promoted through various initiatives with certain independence, able to involve different actors from different levels of public authority, and from the private and popular sector; achieving visible results on different scales of time and without compromising a finite project.

The implementation of policies and programs of urban transformation with a metropolitan scale vision, involve a proactive work of mobilization of resources and management of development projects. These projects have an impact at local level which means that these projects should not be fully defined in advance; they must involve participation of local communities. On the other hand, if the change is fostered from the local level, the support of government instruments is needed to allow investment in infrastructure and services necessary for the effective implementation of local transformations and to respond to a larger scale.

Therefore, is necessary to consider two scales of action: a scenario that shows the possibilities on a metropolitan scale and another that shows the local implications of this transformation; and by doing so, opening the possibilities for top-down and bottom-up strategies. In this work, the "top-down" metropolitan strategy will be focused around density, land use, and infrastructure. It basically will help in setting priorities, in coordinating actions and justifying choices in order provide general goals and to incorporate different actors. According to this place development must carry on further specific interventions more related to the complexity and the character of each place, paying attention to the fine grain of urban forms and social dynamics involved at that scale. According to this, the "bottom-up" local strategy will stressed the importance of the place through three main themes, place identity, place diversity and place governance.

42 Enrique Larranaga. "From multiplicity to paradox: Caracas in the last twenty years of the twentieth century". Santiago de Leon de Caracas 1567-2030.
43 Patsy Healey, Making Better Places. 2010
44 Ibid.
2.3 Metropolitan strategy: Densification through a transport oriented development

“Do you think Caracas must be densified much more?
I think it still supports a lot, but it has to be well densified. Caracas has had absurd developments like those of the southeast, for example, high densities on the hills with transport problems, while you have the River Guaire shaft, served by the metro, plus you could still charge on it more density and which it would fully support, especially if you think about developing an efficient public transport system”. 45

Densification scenarios
Today, Caracas has already a deficit of around 300,000 houses, taking into consideration the trend of growth of population, for 2017 the city will have to incorporate around 450,000 houses, which means that 2 million people will demand their own space in the city (Figure 13). The pressure from these figures pushed the national government to officially declare 50 km2 of land around Caracas for the construction of new urban developments, following the model of “Socialist Cities”, which in combination with a number of random expropriations of land and buildings within city, seek to alleviate the housing crisis (Figure 14). These do not follow a comprehensive development plan to improve and make efficient use of existing structures.

Urban growth means not only the expansion of the city but also involves changes in the position and values of existing parts of the city, therefore these figures imply serious considerations on the existing urban patterns. In general terms, to face growth, existing density patterns and spatial structures, has significant role in influencing the way the city will develop. For instance, if a policy of intensification is advocated, cities with lower densities have more possibilities to accept the growth taking advantage of existing infrastructure and services; on the other hand cities with higher densities might need to expand their urban borders.

Taking into account existing population and density figures as a starting point (Figure 15), we could imagine abstract scenarios to briefly illustrate the impact of growth on existing patterns. If we incorporate these 450,000 houses within the boundaries of the urbanized metropolitan area, the population density will increase from 6,990 inh/km² to 7,785 inh/km² by the year 2017 (Figure 16). These figures are similar to densities in cities such as Santiago de Chile and St. Petersburg in Russia, and much lower than cities such as Taipei, but higher than those of Paris, Berlin or Vienna, whose densities are around 3,500 inh/km². This means that the metropolitan area could eventually be densified without the need of territorial expansion. This could provide impetus for consolidating the existing satellite cities, taking advantage of densification to invest in services, infrastructure and diversification of uses.

If we do the same exercise but in this occasion incorporating the growth within the area that corresponds only to the city of Caracas, the population density would increase from 12,108 inh/km² to 19,781 inh/km² by 2017, figures close to those from cities like Seoul in South Korea and Lagos in Nigeria (Figure 17). This suggests, within the growth outlook exclusively of Caracas’ urban area, it might be necessary to be considered not only a densification of the existing city but also extensions of the urbanized area.
Transport oriented strategy
In order to measure the capacity of densification of Caracas is necessary to take into account the existing infrastructure and the densities associated with them. Perhaps the best indicator in this case is the most consolidated public transport infrastructure, the “Metro de Caracas” subway system. Currently the system has four lines in operation, which do not cover the entire urban area of Caracas (Figure 18). Line 1 covers the east-west axis...
of the city’s Central Valley. This axis has the highest density of employment and uses of the entire city, and the most densely populated areas of Central Valley itself (Figure 19 and Figure 20). Lines 2 and 3 derive from Line 1 to cover the axis of the secondary valleys, which have high population densities, but not necessarily in use or uses. Their main role is to bring population to the areas with more concentration of functions. A newly inaugurated Line 4 reinforces Lines 3 and 1 in the historical central area, which carries the highest densities in the metropolitan area.

Currently there are several plans to extend the “Metro de Caracas”, future Lines 5 and 6 will be complemented by “Metro Cable” lines (cable transport system implemented in several cities in Latin America to serve the settlements on hills) and railway stations that serve the satellite cities of the metropolitan area. The second phase of Line 4 is under construction while lines 5 and 6 are still in project phases and feasibility analysis (Figure 21).

Figure 22 shows in orange the location of new stations at Central Valley; in black can be recognized the stations currently operating. Of these stations stand out with thicker edges, those corresponding to Line 1 in black and to the proposed Line 6 in orange. Taking a coverage radius of 500 meters as an walking distance, we can see that the proposed stations for Line 6, overlap with the area already served by Line 1, this corresponds to the amount of activities concentrated in the main axis of the Central Valley. However, it also states that as a proposal of public transport, it has no clear intention to intervene in the north of the valley, which has less intensity of use, lower densities, fewer possibilities of access and greater fragmentation.

If we use the public transport system as an opportunity for urban transformations at the structural level, having in mind future opportunities for east-west connection, then we could reconsider the location of Line 6, for instance, as an impetus for the densification of the Central Valley (Figure 23). On the one hand, a new transport line increases the chances to densify by providing basic infrastructure; and on the other hand, a
densification project would allow the investment required for the construction of the transport system. In this case it is important to check the densities associated with existing Metro lines, especially Line 1, and thus get an idea of the increase of density a relocated Line 6 could accept.

In a calculation made on the area served by the stations of Line 1, using a radius of 500 meters (walking distance) and overlapping with the population figures provided by the metropolitan municipality, we can sustain that each station covers an average density of 23,538 inhabitants per km². The extremes are given by the area served by “Parque Carabobo” Station, the densest of Line 1 with 35,835 inhabitants per km², and the area served by the “Colegio de Ingenieros” station with a density of 13,423 inhabitants per km² the least dense (Figure 24). Using the same calculation, in this occasion on the area served by the relocated Line 6, we come to an average of 18,094 inhabitants per km² per station. If we use as reference the average density figure of Line 1, as a feasible capacity for each
area served by the stations, we could then locate a population of 57,656 inhabitants along the Line 6 (Figure 25). Applying this same strategy in all stations of the extension plans for the Metro network in Caracas, we could place a total population of 314,785 inhabitants within a radius of 500 meters around the stations (Figure 26). This represents a 15.7% of the estimated growth of Caracas for 2017 (including the housing shortage).

Regarding the “Socialist Cities” projects, despite not having access to official density figures for these new developments, the typologies already built have minimum densities of 4,500 inhabitants per km² and maximum of 18,000 inhabitants per km². According to this, the populations held by the new Metro stations represent from 35% to 100% of the population to be located on the land proclaimed for “Socialist Cities”, without building new roads or transport infrastructure (Figure 27). Even if the strategy is not able to hold the entire population that the “Socialist Cities” are aiming to, this strategy would certainly complement and reduce the city extension.

It is obvious that this strategy is not the only way to densify the city, but it gives us an idea on how existing plans and infrastructure could be used to support progressive urban transformations, opening up possibilities that may lead to other options to densify. The improvement of accessibility is accompanied by investment in public space, facilities and services that could generate new opportunities for growth and densification on a local scale. Certainly such a strategy coming from the public administration with a top-down approach has implications at the neighborhood level to be considered from the beginning. However, the local implications could promote in parallel, changes that support and facilitate large-scale interventions.
Local strategy

2.4 Local strategy: Place development

The term place is not only related with the materiality or physical notions of specific environments where people interact, or territories with particular administrative jurisdiction. The sense of place and of place quality can be understood as some kind of coming together of physical experiences and imaginative constructions produced through individual activity and socially formed appreciations.46

This part of work focuses the attention on the local implications of a metropolitan vision; the approach emphases on the concept of place as a fundamental principle for the consolidation of the community as an urban social unit. To elaborate on the concept of place implies a rich and sensitive understanding of the complex ways in which people lives, an attention on the everyday life and the imaginary built around the experiences of the collective in physical milieus. Therefore, the consideration on the concept of place will include three main topics; first, the recovery of the values of the place as the basis for the construction of identity, an important element in strengthening the community; second, the concept of diversity as a principle that promotes vitality, economic health, social equity and sustainability;47 third, the place governance as a fundamental driver for understanding, shaping and managing urban transformation.

Place Identity

The twentieth century has come to be considered as the age of big governments, centered around the nation state as the provider of the resources of welfare services. On this tradition lies the “social utopia” prized by the social housing projects of the military dictatorship in the fifties, as part of the efforts to give final shape to the new metropolitan scale that Caracas acquired at that time. Nowadays one can recognize similar traits in concepts promoted by the “Socialist Cities”.

The “project of the city as social utopia”, implies a direct relationship between social structures and planned urban forms. This implies that the urban form is responsible for social problems and only reshaping the urban form these problems can be solved. This is a technocratic approach to the city that reflects the twentieth-century urbanism. The problem itself lies on the authoritarian vision involving the “plan” as a vertical totalitarian tool; the idea of “plan” and the reality that represents the “pluralism” seem diametrically opposed. A social problem supposes a failure of the project and the solution involves eliminating the malfunction and starting all over (a new tabula rasa). The ideas behind the construction and then demolitions of modernist social districts in the U.S. and Europe, such as the legendary district “Prue Igott” in St. Louis, are clear examples of this approach.

In contrast, a contextual approach understands the city not as a final project successful or failed, but as a continuity of interventions sometimes planned and sometimes unplanned. This approach accepts the city promoted from both, totalitarian projects (promoted by public or private entities) and from the spontaneous self-organization, highlighting the importance of the place as such and avoiding qualitative judgments. Contextualists like Bruno Fortier, Antoine Grumbach and

Christian de Portzamparc in Paris and Bernardo Secchi, Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Grassi in Italy, promote small scale interventions which were guided by whatever they encountered in the locations concerned, rather than by abstract diagrams or ideological goals projected onto the city in a top-down fashion\(^51\).

This approach shows the importance of the concept of place identity, as a design tool linked to a cultural and social background intrinsically tied to a specific context able to strengthen the concept of community.

In a city like Caracas that has been promoted and built from different sectors, where totalizing plans have not given a definite image to the city, it is necessary to accept the existing different forms as manifestations of a collectivity that has shaped the city according to their own needs; this is in itself an added value to the place that should be recognized as part of the identity of Caracas. The diversity and multiplicity of Caracas, in its fragmented condition, is its true identity. In the reinforcement of local identities of each fragment, a metropolitan intervention that emerges from local projects seems refer to a wider role of the fragment within the city, by implementing these projects as a series of more or less mutually independent interventions, of limited scale although with the impact on the whole \(^52\).

**Place Diversity**

"Human settlements should be socially and economically diverse—mixed in income, mixed in use, and actively supportive of places that commingle people of different races, ethnicities, genders, ages, occupations, and households". According to Emily Talen, this statement represents the cornerstone of the prescription for urban renewal \(^53\). Furthermore, the problems of inner-city-disinvestments and segregation are the most potent manifestation of non-diversity. "Diversity is promoted on the grounds of encouraging a more vital urbanism, achieving social equity, building economic health and improving sustainability".

Diversity is related with the idea of urban vitality because it increases interactions between multiple urban components. Diversity of uses attracts different kinds of users and social groups bringing to a place a reciprocal nature of relationships that allow urban spaces to be maximally used, at all times of the day. Variety of users could also provide cross-cultural knowledge to a place that contributes to creativity promoting innovation and economic growth. Diversity leads to a complex


\(^{52}\) Ibid.

set of relations and dynamics with physical expression in buildings, billboards and the customization of spaces, therefore diversity is not achieved through single patterns. To allow diversity to happen in different scales, the urban layout must tolerate certain flexibility to accept freedom of choices. Is within these particular decisions where everyday life contributes to the richness of the city as a collective living structure.

Jane Jacobs identified particular “generators of diversity” that connected city design to diversity-mixed primary uses, short blocks, buildings of varying age, and a “sufficiently dense concentration of people”. What counts is the “every day, ordinary performance in mixing people”, forming complex “pools of use” that will be capable of producing something greater than the sum of their parts.\textsuperscript{54}

The fragmented system of promotion of the city (from public, private and informal), driven by a market economy has created urban typologies that promote forms of non-diversity such as separation, exclusion and standardization. Racial tension in Venezuela, for instance, does not represent a major problem because society is a historical product of racial and cultural mix; however the tension between social classes is an inherited phenomenon that generates major social breakdowns. The Suburb, for example, emerges as a pattern for those groups who wanted to move away from populated centers, differentiating themselves spatially, reinforcing the spatial boundaries that emphasize the differentiation and generating new forms of segregation. Today, the former suburban system of Caracas embodies the core the city, which has been compacting gradually generating proximity between social groups that seek to be alienated. The problem is not the proximity, but lack of “common places” between different social groups. One could argue that in the district level, Caracas is a socially diverse city, but the reality is that the lack of common places and the strong spatial barriers at the neighborhood level does not allow interaction which creates tension instead of integration. This prevents the consolidation of the community as a unit of urban organization. From this comes the quest to find an appropriate scale to achieve diversity.

Other pattern in that emerged was the spontaneous urbanization. These processes have been an important part of contemporary urban growth and values linked to this process made part of the construction of the contemporary urban fact. The self-construction may be included within the growth strategies of the city, accepting it as a reality and providing infrastructure and

\textsuperscript{54} Emily Talen (2006), “Design that enables diversity: The complications of the Planning Ideal”.
services to ensure the safety and quality of living environment. Strategies promoted by government agencies in contribution with projects of professionals and local efforts have shown examples where combined top-down policies and bottom-up strategies have been satisfactory. The case of “Quinta Monroy” by “Elemental” in Chile is perhaps one of the most widespread, where housing developments built by the state provided a basic architectural infrastructure admitting possible extensions and enlargements from self-construction. In Venezuela, there have been proposals from different sectors that involve self-construction as a force for development. The “Homes Seed” for example, are proposals for progressive housing development on plots with services and foundation bases, which could ensure adequate provision of public services and urban planning to bring accessibility to self-construction settlements. Following this strategy, some municipalities have involved training plans for “popular builders” seeking to provide technical guidance and tools for people to be able to build their own homes. Unfortunately these initiatives are carried out in isolation and not as part of a national development plan involving all government sectors (mayors and governors), private and popular to face of the housing crisis. Strategies to address this crisis are handled directly from the executive power, the stratum of government farthest from local realities. As a result, the pattern of “Socialist Cities” is promoted through mass production of standard building typologies, on mono functional urban settlements targeted to low income social groups, curtailing any kind of sources of diversity.

Place governance
One aspect that characterizes the model of democratic government is to adopt and implement mechanisms that respond to needs of all citizens articulated in collective agreements that satisfy the majority. The problem is that when it comes to specific locations, the distribution of the population does not necessarily reflect directly the interests of the original majority. The formal exercise of power and broader governance mechanisms have distanced themselves from decision-making related to the everyday life of specific locations.

Planning projects have as a basic goal to make better places. Within this concept, governments should facilitate and promote mechanisms to create programs, policies and projects that involve an understanding based on the expertise and vision to respond to objectives related to management of the city. However, the programs and strategies should not be the work only government elites and technocrats. It is recognized in this way that elites and experts should not decide alone what is best for the community without the participation of those who live there. Communities should have a participation in the decision-
making that shapes plans and strategies, involving debate and discussion and not just technical analysis. As claimed by Patsy Healey, *The challenge by the end of the twentieth century was to find ways of giving more attention to citizen voice and initiative, while retaining the capacity to initiate and manage complex development programs justified by a generalized collective purpose* 55.

Caracas presents not only a fragmented urban fabric but also a fragmented political administration. Since 2000 a special law on the Caracas Metropolitan District Regime was enacted, organizing it as a “municipal government in two levels”. It prescribed the integration of various municipalities (Baruta, Chacao, El Hatillo, Sucre and Libertador) under a Metropolitan District. Each of them has a mayor elected through direct and secret vote, which mean 6 political leaders ruling one city. Within the political tension in the country, were some municipalities are controlled by the opposition and some by the government has led to frustrating results.

On the bottom of the governance there are community organizations which in some cases are who effectively assume responsibility. In Caracas, during the years of rapid growth and densification, appeared new ways of aggregation of citizens’ interests; creating social movements organized as “condominium boards” in multi-family dwellings and “neighbor associations” in middle class neighborhoods and un-planned settlements. These organizations changed the conventional urban management system, by confronting administrative irregularities and creating a real “rebellion of the neighbors”56. This organization set the precedents of the idea of citizenship and the establishment of communities in a newly metropolitan Caracas. The sense of community is more evident in unplanned settlements where forms of self-organization with clear hierarchies are in charge of organizing the provision of basic services such as public transport, maintenance of the streets and provision of water and electricity. The living environment is connected to specific social programs that offer micro service facilities and systems of social support. The self-organization of the communities also promotes cultural values through the rescue of folk traditions that today are main part of the city’s cultural heritage. It must be recognized that, despite the deficiencies in access to services and infrastructure that hinder the quality of life in unplanned settlements, the sense of community that exists there has no precedent in other forms of settlements in the city.

The government of Hugo Chavez, within its populist orientation,

55 Patsy Healey (2010), Making Better Places. p. 53
managed to reconfigure these spontaneous associations in political bodies attached to partisan politics as a social extension of the “socialist” political project. Accordingly, the “communal councils” appeared as a form of organization of the community where the people are the ones who make, execute, monitors and evaluates public policies. These forms of neighborhood organization have certainly helped to create political awareness within communities and have encouraged residents to demand improvements in the conditions of life, in most cases to the same government to which they are attached. Of such initiatives emerge alongside other popular movements configuring networks beyond the boundaries of each community. These are organized around the policy of comprehensive neighborhood transformation and self-management of housing and urban policies that permit an improvement in the quality of living environment in un-planned settlements. These organizations cooperate together through wider social movements such as “Movimiento de Pobladores”, who independently implement joint actions towards a more accessible city. Thus by taking into account this kind of local government initiatives the planning system should build strategies for the consolidation of new forms of management that involve people in the process.

*The final mode has grown in importance as citizens have come to demand a greater voice in the delivery of government initiatives. It reflects a steady shift from an understanding* of democratic practice in elite terms to more participatory conceptions of democracy 57.

The transformation and management of neighborhood-level interventions are not definite facts, as it is not the city itself. In the small scale there are on-going processes of change that requires persistent and progressive management from the people who take part of the place’s daily dynamics. Although the plans that come from government agencies provide infrastructure and services from larger scale instances, the final form of the spaces should respond to local initiatives, allowing diversity as part of an identity through the customization of urban spaces as a way to accept changes based in the sense of belonging.

*What people understand as appropriate boundaries between the realms of the private and the public, citizen and state, life world and system world, are fluid and porous. They are always subject to interpretation and definition* 58.

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57 Patsy Healey (2010), Making Better Places.
58 Ibid.
2.5 The Hypothesis:
Everything starts with the project of one street

In a fragmented Caracas, even if the fragments do not interact effectively, the compactness of the city, mainly in the Central Valley carries some advantages. Caracas is a sort of hybrid essentially reinforced by topography which brings different realities very close to each other. There are not large distances between the different uses; everything is intertwined even from the social point of view. Despite the large concentrations of poverty settled on the edges of the city, in the Central Valley different social sectors are interspersed. In this area, there are no large pieces socially homogeneous; there is a great proximity between middle, lower and upper class. The problem is that there have never been effective responses to shape public spaces capable of integrating this diversity. In spite of the gaps that may exist, Caracas is a vital city which has the potential to become a city where public space is enjoyed to the maximum, facilitating social contact.

The proposals for the improvement of public space should take into account the concentration of uses that exist on the east-west axis of the valley, which compose a multi-centric and multi-nodal backbone. Taking advantage of the existing linear logic of distribution of uses and facilities, the aim should be to strengthen the system, ensuring that there is connectivity throughout the axis. There is already a latent system that must be reinforced and rebuilt which can be accomplished in short periods of time.

Figure 28 shows a clear discontinuity of the urban network. In the neighborhood of Sarria, the streets “Calle La Ceiba” and “Calle Libertad” could be connected with “Calle Real de Sarria”; however, the urban barrier that the informal urbanization on one of the natural stream represents did not allow the continuity between these two streets. A project to incorporate a new road that connects the “La Ceiba” street with the “Calle Real de Sarria” involves investment in infrastructure and the demolition of some homes, but also represents a new access point for the area and the opportunity to create a public space that benefits the inhabitants of the immediate environment. This project would certainly have to be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis but without doubt its implementation would represent a significant positive change at the local level. This infrastructure
should provide support for other forms of appropriation in order to give final shape to the space that represents the image of a collectivity that belongs to a specific location. Furthermore the intervention will lead to other local implications regarding reorganization of streets and the relocation of the people affected by the demolition of certain houses. This carries on the opportunity to involve the people in the promotion of the areas for relocation, bringing other opportunities to get benefits.

Focusing on this particular, after making a general revision of the urban network of the Central Valley, searching for dead ends, evident disconnections and discontinuities, were identified around 120 places with similar conditions that could allow possible new connections within the existing network (Figure 29 and Figure 30). These 120 sites represent 120 opportunities to build small-scale projects involving the particular context in which they are located, understanding the needs of the immediate environment but all together producing a big impact at the metropolitan level, improving the permeability and creating new opportunities for accessibility and urban interaction.
The Figure 31 shows an axial analysis on the network of streets and avenues that organize the central valley. Warm colors indicate areas with more street-level integration; this means streets that intersect a greater number of other streets of the network. In this case we can see that the more integrated areas are given by those who are close in structure to the traditional grid, stands out in this case the Hispanic grid of the historical center composed by a regular Cartesian network; and the grid of “Altamira” and “Los Palos Grandes”, which were the suburban extensions that emulated the most the European city typology. The areas that are represented by cooler colors correspond to the most fragmented areas of the valley, which coincide with areas with greater accumulation of barriers and the most isolated fragments shown in Figure 12.

Figure 32 shows a new axial analysis on the central valley including the new 120 points of connection. This time we can see that the areas that previously appeared to be less integrated show an increase in the degree of integration. Although the 120 interventions do not guarantee a homogeneous integration throughout the valley, it responds to the fact that these new possibilities of connection do not involve an overlay of a totalizing grid. In most cases the organizing structures that identify the different fragments are preserved as elements related to the identity of the place.

Figure 33 shows another analysis made on existing street
network. This analysis indicates the lines connecting the valley continuously from east to west. This image highlights the main avenues of the city. Are more obvious the axis “Av. Libertador” – “Av. Francisco de Miranda” in the south and “Av. Boyaca” in the extreme north. Between these two lines we can observe only two rough lines going through the valley without actually connecting end to end. These lines correspond to the so-called “green paths” which are used as alternative routes to congested main avenues, at times of rush hour these roads became also congested. These particular routes are not used by pedestrians; they go mainly through mono-functional residential areas lacking of urban vitality. A new analysis including the new 120 points of connection (Figure 34) shows that the east-west connectivity options increase significantly, giving equal relevance to new connections as the main avenues shown on the Figure 33, relieving some pressure on them.

These tests show the impact on the Central Valley that represents the consideration of these 120 points of connection as a possibility to establish new relations not only vehicular but also pedestrian, and even open the possibility to rethink a public transport system to strengthen this integration. This new system could eventually form a network of public spaces that enhance the linearity of the valley, taken advantage of the multi-centrality and concentration of uses that exist on the east-west axis.

Figure 33 / Topologic analysis of the existing network showing level of integration of streets in the Central Valley in a radius of 20 km. Warm colors indicate streets better integrated through the whole valley.

Figure 34 / Topologic analysis including the “120 new connections” showing new possibilities of integration through the whole valley.
However, the fact that the strategy is based on individual connecting projects and creation of new streets means that if the 120 connections are not fully accomplished, the project is still valid as it allows partial continuities. On the other hand, the flexibility of this strategy does not require that all projects are performed in the same period of time. The progressive implementation allows for a global significance of the projects as other projects are being realized. In the meanwhile each project will continue to play a role within its immediate environment. The new links can provide new possibilities for social interaction but cannot guarantee it. To open up certain areas will allow new things to happen, bringing opportunities for further development in order to provide spaces for social cohesion but also to provide infrastructure, services and access to a wider range of opportunities. In this case the impact on the poorer areas will be more significant.

Taking into consideration that despite the local nature of these projects, the impact would be at the metropolitan level, is necessary to combine the needs of each particular context with the needs of the city as a whole in order to consider an integrated strategy able to face the future growth. To make possible an investment in infrastructure on a local scale, sufficient grounds are needed to support this investment. Matching this with the metropolitan scale described previously, investment on a public transport system needs the support of certain population densities to make it possible, at the same time the idea of local densification justify the targeted investment on this scale. If we believe that part of the immediate needs of the city is to provide the sufficient space required by a population that is now in precarious living conditions, a fact manifested by the figures showing the current housing crisis, we could see this strategy as an alternative to the model of growth implemented by the national government with so-called “Socialist Cities”. The possibility of densification and intensification of the Central Valley of Caracas could grasp a clear answer through these 120 possibilities, and thus set up the entire city to accept the transformation that involves growth.
3.1 Metropolitan approach

As part of the actions promoted by the agencies of power (top-down), is the formulation of goals by defining a clear agenda for local transformations in response to global goals. The objectives are expressed through regulations on the use and development of land and property. In this work, these regulations relate to three main actions to generate a sort of program as an ultimate goal of change. First a strategy for increase and redistribution of population densities; Second, the redistribution of land use; third, the necessary investment in infrastructure to support the transformation in small and large scale, for instance, the reconfiguration of the existing network of streets and avenues, the construction of public space and implementation of a public transport system.

To illustrate the strategies that reflect the interests promoted by government elites I will focus on an area in the Central Valley located between the two most important poles of attraction of Caracas: the Historical Center that concentrates the highest densities of employment and population of the city; and the municipality of “Chacao” that despite the low population density is projected as the new center of Caracas, concentrating the highest density of activities related to urban life (Figure 35). This intermediate area, covered by the “San Bernardino” area and the “Sabana Grande” area, represents one of the most fragmented of the valley with a high concentration of “Urban Barriers” and neighborhoods with less degree of accessibility.

Over the selected area 40 points were identified where it would be feasible to implement projects to connect streets. Assuming that these 40 connections are achieved (following the strategy of the 120 points of connection), a reconfiguration of the existing street network would be accomplished, enabling new possibilities for mobility and accessibility in the area (Figure 36). This reconfiguration underlines a cross-connection which will serve as support for a public transportation system.
The Line 6 proposed to expand the “Metro de Caracas” originally followed the route of the “Avenida Andrés Bello,” that allowed it to have a street section sufficient to provide the space required for an underground line infrastructure, without having to demolish a large number of buildings along the route. However, this location overlay the catchment areas of the new stations with areas already served by Line 1. In order to use this new line as an opportunity to develop the northern area of the valley location, it was decided to move the location further north according to the new possibilities of connection (see metropolitan scale). This change in location involves a smaller section of street, making it unfeasible to build an underground line. In this case is proposed an alternative transport system that involves more flexibility in its implementation using existing streets. A “Rapid Transit System Bus Line” with bus-only channels that have been successfully applied in cities like Bogota and Curitiba, could easily be implemented in this case, complementing the “Metro de Caracas” network. In fact, currently the first phase of “Bus Caracas” is being built in the west of the city following a similar strategy. The street refurbishment works involving the construction of exclusive channels and stations can be harnessed with sidewalks restructuring, construction of bike lanes, lighting and landscaping to improve the quality of the street as public space.

On the basis of this new public transport line, six areas of
analysis centered on a radius of 500 meters are established, in order to consider an urban intervention that could be structured on walking distances (Figure 37). The existing conditions of each area of analysis represent the starting point for setting the parameters to establish the overall objectives to promote the changes in each of these areas. Figure 38 and Figure 39 show the distribution of uses, distribution of social sectors and population densities in every area of analysis. The formulation of a general plan on this scale should be limited to the setting of objectives and regulations in order to provide sufficient population density to support a redistribution and mix of uses and thereby ensure urban vitality to support pedestrian activity.

As for the distribution and proportion of uses, the idea is focused on redistributing the existing land uses and adding new uses, taking as a reference to the current proportion of land use of the urban area of Caracas, but with an increase in the proportion of public space. This strategy seeks to replicate...
a model of city in pedestrian-scale where the whole range of uses that compose the urban life can be reached within walking distances. The measures applied by governmental elites would promote diversification of land use based on existing conditions in each sector. The diversity of uses not only promotes urban vitality but gives new possibilities of access to services and employment, allowing new dynamics that contribute to building local economies and new development opportunities.

The measures involving a redistribution of population densities emerge as an immediate response and support for the incorporation of a public transport system. As discussed in “transport oriented strategy”, those areas of analysis showing lower densities than 23,500 inhabitants per km² should incorporate new people through new housing projects and densification to increase the density as part of a metropolitan strategy. The densification can justify the investment in infrastructure that requires the reconfiguration of streets and public spaces over which the new transport line will be implanted.

As a first step towards the incorporation of these measures, which involve a spatial redistribution is necessary to identify those areas and parcels that are likely to accept changes without involving higher costs. These areas would serve as triggers and starting points on which it would possible to plan the first actions to be taken in order to balance, redistribute uses and densities in the early stages of the process. Figure 40 shows the proportion of available areas in each zone. In this figure are represented vacant areas without a consolidated uses, areas with soft buildings or uses that do not pose major demolition operations, and areas that due to the specific location are suitable for progressive transformation, like change of uses of densification.

Over these six sectors were selected two case studies with very dissimilar conditions. Sector C5 located on the land of the former “Hacienda Blandin”, comprises a part of the Caracas Country Club, the neighborhood that traditionally hosts the most powerful social class of Caracas. This area consists of single family houses with gardens arranged around golf courses. In the same sector also includes a housing development self-implanted on the banks of “Chapellin” stream, which gives its name to the settlement. The “Chapellin” neighborhood is an unplanned development occupied by people of low social strata. Sector C2 is located on the former “Hacienda Mariperez”. This area is characterized by a mixture of large social housing projects promoted in the fifties with self-built housing developments.
3.2 The “Best Land”:
The former “Hacienda Blandin”

The Caracas Country Club is residential district built in the thirties over the land of the former “Hacienda Blandin”, as one of the first suburban extension of the city based on the selection of the “Best places” of the valley to develop. The project was entirely developed in the United States, the architect Cliff Wendhack was the designer of the club house and the landscape was designed by the office of Frederick Law Olmsted. The complex was clearly designed following the parameters of the North American suburb, around golf courses. Since the very beginning the Caracas Country Club has been recognized as the symbol of powerful industrial and political elite with historical aristocratic backgrounds. Some of their villas are nowadays considered architectonic heritage.

Today, within the current political context and the housing crisis, expropriation orders and policies have been given all around the country in order to have availability of land suitable for residential development. The privileged location and features of the golf courts in relation with the city, haven’t passed unnoticed to the eyes of the state. Since 2006 many announcements of expropriation have been made from governmental entities. A recent press release, published the 9th of December 2010 in the context of flood emergency, exposed a study measuring the capacity of the golf courses to accommodate housing developments. As stated in the article itself “It is a completely flat land, located in the center of the valley of Caracas, where in addition provides benefits for the environment, the presence of trees in the area, that most of the citizens must conform to admire them from the outside, because they are only spaces for a few who play golf and have money to belong to clubs”. The engineer Rafael Argotti argues in the same article that “in 123 hectares is possible to build low-density developments (four-story buildings and few houses). He stated that doing a general calculation, could be built 250 buildings of 16 apartments each would accommodate about 4000 average families, equivalent to 20,000 people in total. These figures are about a third of which are currently in temporary shelters”. The program seems to be identical, in terms of building typologies, to the “Socialist Cities” described previously.

The fact is that this is under urban pressure, The Caracas Country Club could be a real opportunity to start an important process of incorporation of new houses within the existing urban fabric. The district and its golf courses have provided a vegetable lung to the city, but at the same time has configured an impermeable social and urban enclave. Despite having been built during the thirties, as one of the first colonizers of the agricultural valley, and after 80 years of transformation of the city and its territory, this district has remained intact. Nowadays, The Caracas Country Club represents an “urban barrier”, in the geographic center on the valley, interrupting physical and spatial east-west connections of the northern part of the city,
representing one of the best examples of the des-articulation of Caracas. In these urban typology “the street reduced to a minimum, is not a place for socializing, while the clubhouse, the golf course and the swimming pool is” 59. Social relationships are established not with those living nearby but with those whose social status is identical. Furthermore the natural and original borders of the former agricultural state, the banks of two streams, are nowadays the base field of two informal settlements “Chapelín” and “Pedregal”. Most of the employees who work cleaning houses, gardens and the club house live in the settlements. The exclusive character of the Caracas Country Club has led, not only to a discontinuous urban tissue, but to segregation and marginalization in their immediate boundaries.

This area is mainly mono functional where prevailing the residential use; hence population densities are very low. The current population density in this area is 10,300 inhabitants per km2, while goal is to have 23,500 inhabitants per km2 as proposed in the transport oriented development. In order to fit this figures a population of 10,382 inhabitants must be included in the area. The graph of proportion of social strata shows sector C5 sector as the most diverse in social groups, however these groups do not interact because there is no spatial conditions that allow this interaction. The graph of proportion of uses highlights the percentage of open green space; nevertheless this corresponds to areas covered by the golf courses that are not public space as such. In order to redistribute and balance the proportion of land use, we can notice that the amount of open space is already on the right proportion; therefore the strategy must include the transformation 153,692 m2 of these golf courses in public parks. Furthermore in order to include the new uses required (productive and service facilities) and the new population, 187,879 m2 of low density residential land use should be transform into a high density mix use development.

The series of maps and charts shown below illustrate the implications of densification in the neighborhood scale on the assumption that the new connections are achieved improving accesibility.

59 Bernardo Secchi, “The rich and the poor”.

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**Densification:**

- Current population density: 10.317 inh/km2
- Goal average density: 23.538 inh/km2
- Need to add 10.382 inh

**Distribution of uses:**

- 153,692 m2 of golf courses to become public space
- 142,900 m2 for change of zoning to high density mixed use
- 9,120 m2 for change to productive uses

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*Re distribution of land use*
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”

Caracas Country Club (Photo: Alexander Perez)

Chapellin (Photo: Sedaile Mejias)

**Sector C5**

Chapellin / Caracas Country Club
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”

Modern vs. Un-planned

Suburban “Garden City” from 1930’s
Un-planned urbanization
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”

Existing Buildings

**Uses**

- Residential
- Productive
- Services

**Densities**

- Un-planned
  - FSI = 1.48
  - GSI = 0.74
  - OSR = 0.17
  - Nf = 0.056
  - Tf = 0.122
  - b = 2.21

- Family Houses with Garden
  - FSI = 1.2
  - GSI = 0.38
  - OSR = 0.52

Building Intensity (FSI) / Coverage (GSI) / Spaciousness (OSR) / Network Density (N) / Tare Space (T) / Profile width (b)
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”

“Quebrada Chacaito” (Photo: Maria Moleiro)

Urban Barriers

Barriers

Streams
Points of Access

1. From Av. Andres Bello
2. From Transversal 8
3. From Av. Boyaca
4. From Av. El Saman

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”
To improve the accessibility were identified 15 points of possible connection. This will allow to reconfigure the existing network. The following series of maps shows the implication in the scale of the district if most of these new connections are achieved.
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”

Project of 15 streets
Reconfiguration of Network
Part 3 / Case Studies

Buildings for demolition

Phase 1 / Industrial Buildings
(for relocation of demolition phase 2)
Area = 10,285 m²
Foot print = 7,303 m²
Gross floor area = 14,708 m²

Phase 2 / Residential Buildings
Area = 21,105 m²
Foot print = 15,618 m²
Gross floor area = 31,236 m²

Total demolition = 45,944 m²

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”
To improve the access conditions of the area to support a densification must involve the restructuring of the streets connected to the main lines of connection of the city.
The existing features of the area such as the fine grain, the landscape and the organic structure are key points to guide the intervention. The golf courses of the Caracas Country Club are the most valuable feature of the area, they are considered one of the most important green areas of the city. The intervention intends to use the attractive landscape and scenery and ecology of this green area as a main potential for the transformation of the area. In this case we propose to transform an area of 254,893 m² corresponding to the holes 11, 12, 13, 15, and 16 in a system of public parks. Golf courses have allowed some of the streams that run through the area retain their natural condition, this represents a privileged status in the valley with a high ecological value.
The new public spaces improves the location conditions of the urban fabrics next to them. This opens the possibilities for these areas to be densified. To avoid that future high density developments block the access to the new public parks, the strategy involves urban rules regarding network density (Nf), Tare space (Tf) and an average for the profile width (b) proposed rules on urban to ensure a minimum number of entrances to public spaces.
To respect the fine grain, the high density developments will have to respect certain conditions regarding the height of the buildings. The heigh rule takes into consideration the line of the facades of the low densities surrounding the area to be densified and establish height limits according to the distance from this line.
The existing low densities cover around the 40% of the plot area in order to have gardens. The greenery of the area is probably the main quality. In order to limit the contact with the land to maintain the existing proportion of green areas, the new developments must have a coverage (GSI) of 0.4 similar to the existing. By combining the height rule with the coverage rule the proposal is automatically setting a maximum volumes. Even if the GSI is the same for every plot, the capacity is higher in the plot more distant from the existing low densities according to the height rule. This gives different conditions to each plot, therefore different possibilities for densification. In order to guarantee a minimum of gross floor area in order to incorporate the new densities...
proposed in metropolitan strategy, is necessary to establish a minimum building intensity rule (FSI) for each plot. The urban envelope given by the height rule will be enchrage to establish a maximum FSI.
The densification does not imply automatically the demolition of the existing houses and buildings of the area to be densify. The rules are able to incorporate existing building within the high density. These buildings will have new potential to allow changes in their use.
**Densification Summary**

**Densification Goals (G.F.A.)**
- New Inhabitants (10,382) = 333,035 m²
- New Services = 68,030 m²
- New Productive = 42,899 m²
- Total Densification = 443,964 m²

**Demolition (G.F.A.)**
- Phase 1 / Industrial = 14,708 m²
- Phase 2 / Residential = 31,236 m²
- Phase 3 / Industrial = 13,362 m²
- Phase 3 / Residential = 84,112 m²
- Total Demolition = 143,418 m²

**Total Aim = 587,382 m²**

- Proposed
- Mix-Use Development (G.F.A.)

**Total (Min) = 626,086 m²**

**Total (Max) = 856,781 m²**

**Change of Uses**
- Productive / Services = 59,823 m²
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Best Land”: the former “Hacienda Blandin”

New skyline of the former “Hacienda Blandin”
3.3 The “Worst Land”:
The former “Hacienda Mariperez”

While the real estate market developed projects of urban expansion following the “Garden City” model over the “best land” that the valley could offer, the land less suitable or the “worst land” were occupied gradually by informal developments. This study sector corresponds to the grounds of the agricultural state belonging to Maria Perez, this area included geographically rugged land due to passage of streams. By 1951 the beds of streams that cross the sector had already been occupied by informal developments, forming the so-called “Barrio Independencia”. In 1957, was built the “Simon Rodriguez neighborhood unit” designed by architect Carlos Raul Villanueva and promoted by the dictator Marcos Perez Jimenez in order to relocate the marginal population of “Barrio Independencia” in one of the many modernist developments built during that period in different parts of the city. The works included the formation of two terraces that modified the original topography of the site, and the construction of the Plaza Andres Bello as an access point from the “Av. Andres Bello”. In a first stage, 8 buildings were built under the concept of the “superblocks” offering 1380 housing units for rent, occupying the north terrace. The second terrace built for a second stage was squatted immediately after the first stage was completed; taking advantage of the suitability of a flat terrain, which had deleted the original difficult topographic lines. This was a common phenomenon in most housing developments of this period. This intervention instead of offering a solution to informal urbanization, it pushed it even more. Despite this experience, in 1966 was built the neighborhood “Pinto Salinas west” to again attempt to remove and relocate the invading population in new superblocks of 15 floors each. The experience was repeated once again with the construction of “Pedro Camejo” and “Mariperez”.

Today the area of study is characterized by the contrast of urban tissues promoted by opposed sectors setting a composition of different urban forms of poverty. As a result this sector is in physical and social decay that is evident in the numbers of insecurity and crime that represents perhaps the greatest threat to the quality of life of local residents. Despite being located in the heart of the central valley, very near the historic center, the existing urban structure does not allow good conditions of accessibility able to add value to the location of the sector in order to attract investment for the improvement of the quality of space. In this case the investment in maintenance, provision of services and equipment is left exclusively in to the state, which has historically been unable to improve the living conditions of the place. As is commonly the case in informal developments, much of the basic provision of services and small equipment arises spontaneously from the resident population as the only response to the urgencies of the daily life. The communal councils and individual initiatives play an important role in the survival of the community, however but the involvement of both the public and the private sector is necessary to make
these initiatives effective and sustainable in time, meaning a real improvement in the precarious living environment. On this basis, the strategy proposes the gradual improvement of living environment through the promotion of small scale operations that will improve the accessibility. At this scale is proposed as a starting point “the project of one street”. The aim is to be able to involve local organizations as key promoters, as well as public and private sectors, through a simple intervention with short-term results according to the immediacy of urgencies.

The implications of such operations automatically transcend the local level and generate an impact at the sector in general. The promotion of more than a “project of a street” should also mean an attractive for investment on the sector in general. Assuming that the opening of new connections is achieved in all the points identified for this purpose, the process of total transformation should include those objectives raised on a metropolitan scale. According to the first general analysis, this sector has the highest population densities in the study area which is around 36,900 inh. per km². In this particular case the goal of 23,300 inh. per km² is already reached, which means that the area already has enough density of population to support further interventions, though in order to provide a better quality of the living environment and incorporate further uses and infrastructure, a redistribution of the existing population will be considered. This area is primarily residential; however the composition of informal fabrics also hosts industrial developments and workshops. Within the social housing developments of the fifties some services and urban facilities were included which makes this area not fully mono functional. In any case it is necessary to incorporate new uses to reach the suggested proportions, hence 148,960 m² of residential land use should be change into new public space (112,757 m²) and productive uses including commercial, industrial and offices (111,600 m²).

The series of maps and charts shown below illustrate the implications of small projects at both the intervention itself as a neighborhood scale on the assumption that the “project of a street” is repeated in each of the points identified for this purpose.
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Modern vs. Un-planned

Social housing projects from 1950’s

Un-planned urbanization
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”
Part 3 / Case Studies

The "Worst Land": the former "Hacienda Mariperez"

Points of Access
1. From Av. Andres Bello
2. From Av. Panteon
3. From Av. Boyaca
The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Existing Buildings

Uses
- Residential
- Productive
  - Commercial / Industry / Offices
- Services
  - Public Facilities / Public Services / Institutions

Densities

Un-planned
- FSI = 1.48
- GSI = 0.74
- OSR = 0.17
- Nf = 0.056
- Tf = 0.122
- b = 2.21

Industrial Clusters
- FSI = 1.43
- GSI = 0.71
- OSR = 0.2

Building Intensity (FSI) / Coverage (GSI) / Spaciousness (OSR) / Network Density (N) / Tare Space (T) / Profile width (b)
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Areas for Relocation

Area = 84,198 m²
Project of one street

Connection between:
- Calle La Ceiba
- Calle Libertad
- Calle Real de Sarria
The open “public spaces” of the modernistic “Urbanizacion Simon Rodriguez” are un-used. In the urban tradition of Caracas these spaces are ideal sites for un-planned urbanization.

The project of this street seeks to brake an urban barrier. Some buildings must be removed and their residents relocated.
The open “public spaces” between blocks seem to be the ideal site for the relocation of the residents of the demolished houses. The contrasting dimensions of the superblocks in relation to the small grain un-planned urbanism represent the contemporary image of the modern “ideal city”. The proposal considers this historical reference as part of the identity of the place. The relocation configures the block with similar grain as the un-planned settlements of the area, but with better implantation regarding spaciousness and ventilation. The block seeks to consolidate the street profile lost in the “modern” composition. The relocation also includes the productive buildings demolished within the block, promoting diversity in a street level. In the first phase, the public authorities must provide benefits to the relocated residents but the relocation process must involve the people in the process as promoters. The regularization of the property of the land plays a key role.
To brake the barrier and incorporate a street involves the incorporation of sidewalks, streets for cars, bicycle lanes, and bus lanes. The new spatial configuration left by the demolition of certain buildings gives the opportunity to create different public zones. Providing flexible spaces able to allow buffer areas between the interior private space and the street infrastructure.

The sensible treatment of these limits will promote street life. The street becomes a space for interaction between residents and outsiders. The flexible area also provides the space for street economies which are likely to occur spontaneously in vital places of Caracas. Street economies frequently become spontaneous urban nodes.
New local nodes contributes to the vitality of the new street. The buildings that are now facing the streets have the potential to change their uses. This will increase the value of the property and will bring economic opportunities. The new street configuration will provide an adequate location for commercial and public facilities, as well as social organizations usually hidden within the informal structure. The residents can either create a new business of sell their house. In that case, the blocks planned for the relocation can incorporate new houses in a second phase. In this occasion the state will not provide the property but will offer facilities and assistance in order to support self construction as way to promote urban development.
The following series of maps shows the implication in the scale of the district if the project of one street is repeated in all the points identified as ideal for this purpose.
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Project of 17 streets

Reconfiguration of Network
The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

New Points of Access

13 Points of access
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Renovation Area

Area = 82,410.96 m²
The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

**Buildings for demolition**

- **Residential Buildings**
  - Area = 29,637 m²
  - Foot print = 21,932 m²
  - **Gross floor area = 43,864 m²**

- **Industrial Buildings**
  - Area = 45,232 m²
  - Foot print = 32,145 m²
  - **Gross floor area = 64,682 m²**

- **Service Buildings**
  - Foot print = 8,300 m²
  - **Gross floor area = 8,300 m²**

**Total demolition = 116,846 m²**
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

**Relocation / Small Grain**

**Existing un-planned / Densities**
- GSI = 0.74
- OSR = 0.17
- Tare = 0.12
- b = 2.21

**Demolition / Areas**
- Area = 83,169 m²
- Foot print = 62,347 m²

**Proposed small grain plots**
- GSI = 0.55
- Tare = 0.3
- OSR = 0.25
- b = 4
- Area = 60,554 m²
- Foot print = 33,304 m²
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Relocation phase 1

small grain

Existing un-planned / Densities
FSI = 1.48

Demolition / Areas
Gross floor area = 116,846 m²

Proposed small grain buildings
FSI = 1.48
Residential = 17,277 m²
Productive = 21,777 m²

Gross floor area = 39,064 m²
The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

**Relocation phase 1**

**High Density**

**Demolition / Areas**

- Area = 83,169 m²
- Foot print = 62,347 m²

**Proposed high density plots**

- GSI = 0.48
- Area = 25,854 m²
- Foot print = 12,638 m²
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Relocation phase 1

High Density

Demolition / Areas
Gross Floor Area = 116,846 m²

Proposed high density buildings
FSI = 4.15
Productive (plinth)
GSI = 0.48
FSI = 1.95
Gross Floor Area = 50,552 m²
Residential (tower)
GSI = 0.37
FSI = 2.19
Gross Floor Area = 56,849 m²

Gross Floor Area = 167,398 m²
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

[Map of the area with buildings highlighted for new uses.]

Buildings with new potentials
Area = 47,550 m²
Foot print = 35,261 m²
Gross floor area = 70,522 m²
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Relocation phase 2

small grain

Proposed small grain buildings
Area = 13,511 m²
FSI = 1.48

Gross floor area = 19,997 m²
The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

**Relocation Summary**

**Demolition (G.F.A.)**
- Residential = 43,864 m²
- Industrial = 64,682 m²
- Service = 8,300 m²
**Total demolition = 116,846 m²**

**Relocation High Density (G.F.A)**
- Residential = 56,849 m²
- Productive = 50,552 m²

**Relocation Small Grain (G.F.A)**

**Phase 1**
- Residential = 17,277 m²
- Productive = 21,777 m²

**Phase 2**
- Residential = 19,997 m²

**Total Residential = 94,123 m²**
**Total Productive = 72,329 m²**

**Total Relocation = 166,452 m²**

**Change of Uses**
- Productive / Services = 70,522 m²
Part 3 / Case Studies

The “Worst Land”: the former “Hacienda Mariperez”

Proposal for “Calle La Ceiba”, a new access to the former urban barrier.
The private sector was a pioneer in the early growth of Caracas and invested capital on urban developments located on sites with optimal conditions, generating a real estate market and the increase of the land value of specific areas of the valley. On the other hand, the population excluded from the market also invested capital, but the investment was intended to address immediate emergencies beyond generating market dynamics and capital accumulation. This generated an urbanism from the emergency with significant gaps in the quality of space, which does not generate value over time and contributes to the consolidation of poverty as a mass phenomenon. This forced government agencies to create housing plans that focused on solving the immediacy of the problem with projects capable of delivering large amounts housing units but of neglecting aspects related with the quality living environment, triggering a recurring historical failure. The investment from the informal and the public sectors has not contributed to generate value. In economic terms, if an investment does not generate value over time but otherwise loses value every day, means a failure. Historically the capital for the construction of large housing complexes has not meant an investment but a social cost.

In the world there is knowledge and technology to build and deliver thousands of homes a year. This has been and remains the focus and purpose of the public sector to deal with growth. However there is no clear strategy of how to achieve quality out of these developments. The challenge is how to not make quantity and quality opposite terms. If we consider the production of houses as an investment, a good quality house should be able to produce profits and increase their value over time. The value attached to housing is related to the quality of construction but the location may play the most decisive role. Therefore, by improving local conditions we can make the homes have the capacity to increase their value over time.

On this basis, the case studies presented here address the urban growth from a simple strategy of improving the conditions of living environment. Improving the conditions of accessibility is the starting point to promote progressive change, to improve local conditions in order to create opportunities that allow the...
investments already made increase their value. The focus is not on selecting the best or worst land, but to make existing ones better. This promotes individual initiative and secure investment, so the city could be able to promote itself.

Accordingly, it is not required one direction territorial scale efforts to address growth to the masses. This work proposes to bring down the scale and focuses on promoting local operations with concrete and visible goals, capable of solving specific urgencies in short periods of time on projects that allow the face to face relationships between different actors. This facilitates cooperation and consensus in decision making and assessment of costs and benefits that implies “the project of a street”.

In the case of the “Hacienda Maripérez”, the “projects a street” seek to improve the access that allows residents of lower-income to be inserted into the network of opportunities of the city. To increase the amount of access points represent an investment in infrastructure and services that will undoubtedly signify an improvement to the precarious conditions in which the sector is today. The creation of new streets supported by public transport and with flexible spaces, will allow the generation of local economies. Furthermore, the regularization of property in the relocation process will make individual investment in housing have the opportunity to sustain its value. However, to be well located involve the fact of having to be able to pay more expensive land, in this case the strategy should be complemented by defining the densities high enough to distribute between more families increased land value.

While the “Hacienda Maripérez” seeks to improve the place, in the case of the “Hacienda Blandin” The goal is to take advantage of the economic and ecological conditions of the site to promote an urban development that redefines the role of this sector in city context.

In proposing a development of high density and mixed use involves opening up of an area historically sealed to a city that pressure this space. This strategy does not seek to displace the resident population but rather incorporate it through new business and market opportunities. The challenge is to convince these people, who traditionally seek and defend exclusivity, that a proposal which will provide new opportunities to attract new users and to transform part of their property in public space means a benefit to them. Assuming that this is achieved, there is no guarantee that the densification of the Caracas Country Club will be inclusive. This means that just to open new points of access does not imply inclusion and social cohesion.

The (dead)end
The complexity of urban and social relations requires multiple proposals and good intentions that contribute to the improvement of the city from various sectors, economic, social, political and professional. This work simply seeks to identify and to open new opportunities to promote transformations involving these multiple sectors. The urban development proposals rather than impose must be able to include. So to convince the residents of a “dead end” street, who value the exclusivity, quietness and security, that to open up their street to the city will be beneficial to them is perhaps the most difficult challenge. On the other hand, if in one “dead end” this is not achieved, we still have other 119 opportunities.

Conclusion Better Land

Better Land
IV Bibliography

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Articles:


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