

## COOPERATION RECONSIDERED

### The case of Comité del Pueblo in Quito

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#### ABSTRACT

The case of Comité del Pueblo is an historical example, of a neighborhood of Quito created in the 70's by a complex cooperative machine, which had the ability to overcome, legally, the shortcomings of the government. 5000 families in need of housing, an extreme left wing political party and a faculty of architecture, together in an impressive project of solidarity. A critical reflection on such example nowadays, uncovering the vanguard social figures of students, architects and urbanists, is not finalized to celebrate its premises, but rather to question the experience in the light of on-going Ecuadorian discussions on participation and inclusion. A lesson that probably deserves to be re-read as one of the scarce attempts to satisfy the right to the city in Quito.

**Keywords:** self-help neighborhood, participation, *minga*<sup>1</sup>, Quito

#### RESUMEN

El caso de Comité del Pueblo es un ejemplo histórico de un barrio de Quito fundado en los 70's. Diseñado y realizado a través de una compleja maquinaria cooperativa, hubo la capacidad de colmar legalmente, aunque sin involucrar al gobierno, una masiva demanda de vivienda. 5000 familias en necesidad de un hogar, un partido político de 'extrema izquierda', y la Facultad de Arquitectura de la Universidad Central de Quito trabajando juntos en un impresionante proyecto de solidaridad. La relevancia de considerar hoy en día este ejemplo, dejando patente las figuras vanguardistas de los estudiantes, arquitectos y urbanistas involucrados, no es para alabarlos, si no mas bien para cuestionarlos a la luz de la actual discusión sobre participación e inclusión en el Ecuador. Una historia que merece ser releída como uno de los escasos intentos de satisfacer el derecho a la ciudad en Quito.

**Palabras claves:** auto-construcción, participación, *minga*, Quito

#### INTRODUCTION

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<sup>1</sup> *minga*: There is no English translation for the word *minga*, which derives from the Quechua language (Mink'a) and consists of collaborative free work characteristic of the Andean populations. A custom based on reciprocity, solidarity and redistribution, exercised since pre-colonial times and now, with more or less intensity, still actual all along this extended mountain region. The *minga*, more precisely, is an operation of self-management, where individuals act in a performative manner to construct their own environment collectively, but differently from any other Latin American practice of self-management in marginalized and generally low-income settlements, it has a very precise organizational structure, calendar and cultural meaning.

This contribution will try to answer to two main questions: which were the political, methodological and design bases on which Comité del Pueblo was founded? What can be learned nowadays from this giant, legal, self-help neighborhood, co-designed and physically built through *mingas*?

The objective is to illustrate this not well known case of urban cooperation and solidarity that took place in Quito during the 70's, giving particular attention to the role of the Faculty of Architecture of the Universidad Central all along the investigation, design and building process.

The decision to re-read this vanguard and inventive case, lays in the potentialities that Comité del Pueblo guards via à vis the conception of more choral and less abstract participatory processes in the contemporary Ecuador. In this actual historical moment this reflection is seen particularly relevant for two main reasons: the openness of the Ecuadorian Constitution and National Plan of the *Buen Vivir*<sup>2</sup> on issues as participation, citizens' inclusion and right to the city (A.C., 2008, art.31) and the urgency to bridge the gap between these institutional norms and their implementation. Looking hence at historical dynamics and cultural practices, as the tradition of the *minga* and its application in the case of CdP, the multidisciplinary relations between stakeholders and the citizens' involvement in the various steps of implementation, is seen for the Ecuadorian case a way to imagine contemporary and likewise culturally integrated, inclusive scenarios (Masmiquel, 2013). The paper is structured into five parts:

1) 'Quito, the housing problem and the revolutionary air' will look at the political and economical condition of Quito at the beginning of the 70's, focusing on the history of the formulation of the Committee Pro-Social Housing.

2) A second part titled 'TISDYC in theory' will concentrate on the involvement of the faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the Universidad Central of Quito. Illustrating the TISDYC workshop format through their methodological background, the critical positioning of students and professors on contemporary crisis and their cultural references.

3) 'TISDYC in practice', the third chapter, will instead precisely look at the project of the neighborhood Comité del Pueblo itself. Explaining the different processes of investigation, design and realization.

4) Nearing the end, 'Comité del Pueblo now' critically looks at the actual situation of CdP. This chapter, tries to give some answers on why, although its singular past, nowadays this neighborhood, with all its deficiencies and criticalities, looks like most other Latin American post-informal settlements.

5) Finally 'Cooperation reconsidered' proposes a conclusive reflection on this project of the past, vis à vis the Ecuadorian actual discussion on participation and inclusion in the attempt to satisfy the right to the city<sup>3</sup>.

The following contribution is conceived as a dialogue between different sources. The historical ambitions are illustrated through the scarce archive and deep on-site research, the actual situation is drawn through fieldwork observation and spatial analysis and finally several future aspirations are set through the consultation of municipal projects and press releases.

## 1) QUITO, THE HOUSING PROBLEM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY AIR



Informal settlements in the 70s in Quito  
Herdoiza 1996, p.118

### 1.1 Historic-political situation of Quito

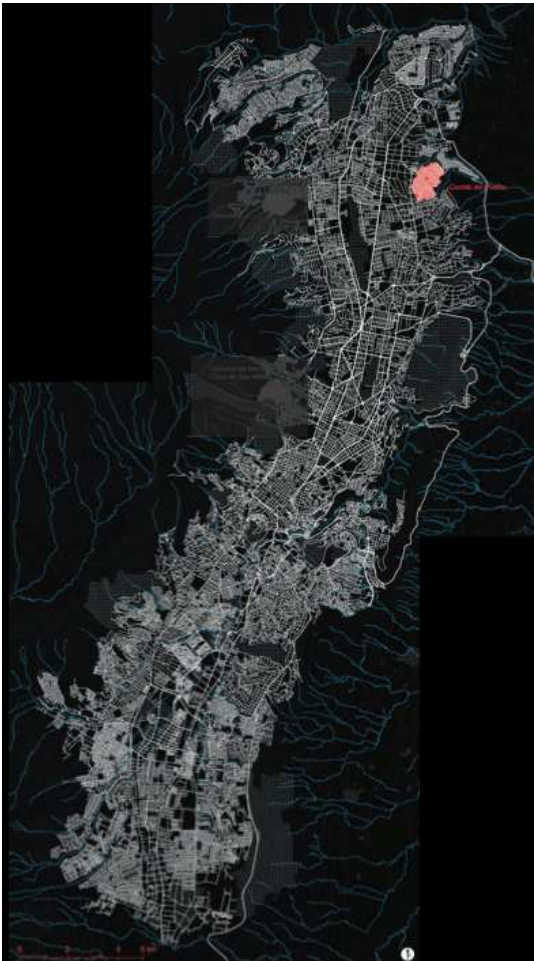
In 1971 the Ecuadorian dictatorship of Victor Ibarra ends and in 1972 Ecuador becomes an oil-exporter country. The wide industrialization which follows is totally dependent from the role of the State, which guards its entire management (Bravo, 1980). This lets a relative autonomy from the traditional dominant sectors and conduces to the beginning of redistributive politics. Thanks to this new model of accumulation, Quito positions itself as the center of public administration, while before was mainly concentrated in the port city of Guayaquil. Despite the prosperity of Quito though, the redistribution doesn't reach all social classes, but it is concentrated in the dominant ones (landowners of the Andean region, agro-exporters and various kinds of traders), reaching also the modern industrial bourgeois connected to transnational exportation and the middle one related to state and private activities. The rest of

<sup>2</sup> *Buen Vivir* is the fundamental concept at the base of the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution and National Plan. It derives from the quechua term *Sumak Kausai*, and can be translated as 'well living', a philosophy of live which supports the social organization, the collective wellbeing and a delicate relation between humans and nature (Houtard, 2011; Testori, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Right which appears in the Article 31 of the recent Ecuadorian Constitution

the social sectors however remains isolated from the oil boom and for some (craftsmen, farmers, smallholders,..) this capitalist development moreover causes a deterioration of their lifestyle. (ibid.) In this situation being a farmer was becoming always more demanding and due also to the restrictions imposed to small farmers by the agrarian reforms of 1964 and 1973, a strong migration trend, from rural areas to the city of Quito, takes place<sup>4</sup> (IMQ, 1992; Kingman, 2006). As a result, this process consolidates in the capital a vast urban sector, heterogeneous and unorganized, which has very scarce access to housing market, social housing and urban facilities.<sup>5</sup> As Oña Lenin reports, in order to better understand the situation of lower classes, must be underlined that in the period between 1962 and 1975, land price rises irrepressibly up to 427,5% and likewise rents and materials of construction (Oña, 1980).

## 1.2 Historical steps of the creation of the Comité



Location of CdP in Quito (previously Hacienda Eloisa)  
elaborated by the author

It is in this precise moment (1971) when a 'vindictory' organization called *Comité Pro-Vivienda Popular* (Committee Pro-Social Housing) rises. Its leaders are militants from the Communist Marxist Leninist Party of Ecuador (PCMLE) and its existence creates a new alternative to the syndicalism organizations and the orthodox traditional left. This movement manifests its discontent vis à vis the dictatorship, cares about the exacerbation of the urban problem in the city of Quito, the rise of consumerism and overall the housing issue. During the first two years of its foundation, the 'extreme left' party realizes wide campaigns in extended popular sectors of the city, and what boost the affiliation to it was an appealing propose of the existence of a housing cooperative that offers land for a sucre<sup>6</sup> for square meter (Bravo, 1980). What gives them more credibility and hope is that, since the beginning, the housing demand the committee stood, had legal support, as the group is referring to a decree issued in 1938 which claims that anyone can apply for the expropriation of rural and urban land. (ibid.) What also avoided a strong repression against them, is the fact of never sponsoring land occupations and illegal procedures, giving right to private land.

Due to the opposition of the Church and the BEV (*Banco Ecuatoriano de la Vivienda*) the negotiations for obtaining a land, Fundacion Mariana de Jesus in 1971 and Hacienda Mena 1972, both fail. In the meanwhile the movement seeks technical advices from the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanisms of the Universidad Central (FAU) to design a new neighborhood for all the members of the Comité. Not getting to any arrangement with the municipal institutions, makes them decide to act independently from the State and go in search for a land on sale acquirable directly from the movement and their members. Organized in brigades and supported by an always more involved student

movement, after covering the entire city, they found another Hacienda, La Eloisa: 140 hectares located in the north of the city. After a period of negotiation they finally obtain the land paying the owner 16 millions of sucres; and from now on, starts the real involvement of a large group of students and professors of the FAU. The interaction between these three main actors is probably one of the most original and innovating aspect of this case: a political party, 5000 low income families that were looking for a land where to build their shelter and an institution like the University; all working together at an enormous social project.

## 2 TISDYC IN THEORY

<sup>4</sup> In 1962 the urban municipality of Quito had 340.000 inhabitants while in 1974 were 600.000 (IMQ, 1992)

<sup>5</sup> A process quite common during these years in all Latin America (Plöger, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> The sucre was the Ecuadorian currency until the dollarization of the year 2000. In the 70's 1 sucre was equal to 0.04 US\$.

## 2.1 Wilson Herdoiza and the Research, Design and Communication Workshop

As soon as the FAU has been involved, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1973, the TISDYC workshop opened its doors. Standing for Research, Design and Communication Workshop, was conceived as a module to involve the students in an University Extension programme;<sup>7</sup> complementary classrooms and laboratory work expressly incorporated into the teaching and learning system. An innovative module to make students learn alternative lessons with a direct contact with social reality. Behind its specific application indeed, a more ideological significance laid at its base: the will of diffusing a political consciousness and reform the academia, getting hence rid of its conservatism and technocracy (Herdoiza, 1982, 1990).

The founder of TISDYC and main responsible for its first application with the case of Comité del Pueblo, was the architect and Full Professor of the School of Architecture of the Central University of Ecuador, Wilson Herdoiza. An extremely polyhedral and smart personality who aside from architecture, received a doctorate in Sociology from the School of High Studies in Social Science in Paris. He was working at that time at the laboratories of Alain Touraine, Manuel Castells and Jean Lojkiné on the topic of 'Power relationships in the occupation of urban space in Ecuador'. Moreover afterwards he has been president of the Interdisciplinary Research and Participation Network (RIIP), a foundation through which he has carried out many research projects and technical studies in the field of planning and restoration. He also chaired the International Council on Monuments and Historical Sites (ICOMOS-Ecuador) and still belongs to multiple international scientific and technical organizations.

The TISDYC format has soon become an institution applied in many different contexts (ex. 28 neighborhoods in the Northwest of Quito, in Imbabura, Manabi, Amazon Area, etc.) and which lasted in the faculty of the School of Architecture for over 30 years. Its longevity, says Herdoiza, is not casual, but it's thanks to the fact of being planned since the beginning as a long-term initiative, with a specific methodology and structure applicable and adaptable to different contexts and periods, that lasted for so long.

## 2.2 The methodological background

This 'experimental unit' had indeed specific principles and objectives, which professor Herdoiza explains in a very detailed speech given in 1990 titled 'From the South, for students from the South' upon the inauguration of the seventeenth year of TISDYC activities. The principles are three and are the followings: the relevance of scientific research in universities, the rigorousness that must be built into professional training and the importance of keeping the university anchored in country's grassroots sectors (Herdoiza, 1993).

2.2.1) Discussing research he presents the concrete advantages of applying dialectics and the unpostponable need to bolster forecasting research work. Due also to the fact that at that time Ecuador was carrying very little scientific investigation, Herdoiza points out that the university must change, renewed, reform (ibid.). He argues for a production of knowledge which takes distances from 'synchrony' and 'diachrony' and better tends to a process based on 'dialectics'. The idea is that there are elements of work, resources with which it's possible to intervene in a concrete reality in order to understand it and above all, transform it. Concerning this research aspect and its objectives, the investigation is interpreted not in order to know something, but to transform it qualitatively. Investigation is seen as a crucial aspect to understand the community, the people subjected to the analysis. Understanding the current situation is the starting point to envision a better future and it is by coupling present and past that can be imagined. "If we say we are designers, then we need to envision the future to see what direction events and processes will take and what fundamental elements of such orientation are" (Herdoiza, 1993: 86). "We need to have a vision geared to the future; we need to predict future events in order to be able to propose 'policies', establish 'plans' and construct 'programs' that will move into the future and transform reality. For this reason, research is an activity of process that arises from history, that advances through the present and aims for the future" (ibid.).

2.2.2) In connection with professional training, he argues that higher education has to provide students with integrated preparation, comprising – in the case of the School of Architecture – scientific, political, technical

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<sup>7</sup> There are many other cases in Latin America of *extension universitaria*, literally 'university extension'. It is in 1918 with the University Cordoba Reform (Argentina) that the aspect of linking the university with the society becomes a pillar. Then in 1957 there is the First Latin American Conference on *Extension Universitaria* in Santiago del Chile, in which the concept is well defined, and in 1972 during a second conference that took place in Mexico, this 'extension' takes a reciprocal meaning: helping the social sector but also learning from it. More than 20 years later (1998) it is a concept that will appear also in the UNESCO World Declaration of Higher Education. (D'Andrea et al, 2009) Between the most successful cases we can count among the experiences of the UBA (University of Buenos Aires), with the Cultural Centre Rector Ricardo Rojas and the one of Ernesto Sabato respectively in the faculties of the Psychology and Economical Sciences (Atcon, 2005). While a more recent one is the example of the Faculty of Sociology of the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in Bolivia (Paz Rada, 2012). But the case of the Comité del Pueblo seems to be the biggest and longest interaction between a Latin American faculty of architecture and the social sectors of all times.

and artistic training. (Herdoiza, 1993). The main idea in this case is to create a new type of professional to confront the principal problems of Ecuador. Until that moment professionals have been produced in a traditional way which mechanically inserted them into the context of existing social and political groups and most often, for Herdoiza, just vegetate in the system. "Looking out just for his/her interests cannot be accepted anymore" (ibid.:21). In his speech of 1990 he said "if you must enter public administration, do it, with a new spirit so that you can introduce changes...we want you to leave with a new 'architect image', as term is used today" (ibid.: 87). Addressing the students, he explains that they will be high-level figures for the society, with a role of great responsibility and their performance should create a framework to extend the reproduction of a system which is highly related to social classes permanently in struggle. "The architect who leaves the University today normally would not do that. We are talking about a new type of architect with overall vision who knows how to take part in politics" (ibid.). Not a politician who goes to TV shows and congresses, but a scientific molded person who understands political science. A technician who knows very well Ecuador and has an artistic sensibility to initiate a transforming process, motivated by the beauty in the society and the world.

2.2.3) In the third point Herdoiza explains how it is indispensable to relate the University to the masses and popular organizations. "None of architects who have graduated from our universities are working in the poor urban or rural areas...where there is lack and need of housing, drinking water, health care, education, etc...where resides the people that make up the real essence of this country" (Herdoiza, 1993: 84). A lack that, for him, needs to be compensated with urgency. He then specifies that linking the highest educational institution to the people is neither populist nor demagogic proposal, but rather a must to be tackled through a new approach. Absorbing the 'people's objectivity' in the vision of the reality of events, is a task hardly achievable by university representatives due to epistemological difficulties. Relate and understand those sectors is a way to uncover through them the national reality. The author referring to what the mayor of Quito proposes, like fountains, gardens, pedestrian areas...he wonders: "what would the popular mass say about that?" (Herdoiza, 1993: 89). This because until now, popular knowledge hasn't been enough considered, while it is extraordinary, rich and innovating. Joining popular classes is a way to understand their know-how cultural inheritance, grasp the way in which, even if under severe scarcity, they have faced and resolved their serious affairs. Still concerning this third and conclusive point, 'action-research' is named as a new process of scientific investigation, where acting, participating and working from the bottom-up, serves to learn and discover. Finally this 'University alongside the common people' has a clear political reference based on the 'alliance of classes', referring to the fact of recognizing university students and professors not as proletariat, but with an ethical duty to join them as being the largest amount of the Ecuadorian population. Finally this alliance, these joint forces between university and popular knowledge, can create an 'extended scientific community', which cannot be improvised, but better conducted by a scientific methodology. We can hence argue that this module called TISDYC, had a double meaning, from one side develop projects and create support to lower income classes, and from the other is used as an expedient to put in practice the longed university reform, or as students more drastically call it, a real revolution (TISDYC n2).<sup>8</sup>

### 2.3 Critical positioning inside the School of Architecture

To understand indeed the students' perspective, the quires titled '*Arquitectura en la Reforma*' publicized by the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the Universidad Central from 1971 up to 1976, are used as their means of communication. Expression of discontent and need of reform, a way to illustrate the building process of Comité del Pueblo, but also a vehicle for strong critique to dictatorship, mining policy and the indifference of the State in the Ecuadorian housing problem.

In their publication we can read: "Our fight, our commitment is together with the people. Today, the university starts marching shoulder to shoulder with the popular sectors" (pag.0, TISDYC n2).

A call for defending the autonomy of the university, which at the time was seeing the architect as designer of beauty and functionality, embedded in a bourgeois optic, limited to the levels of the form without understanding its content (TISDYC n5, 1976: 9). For the students' movement, utopias had to be discarded and an active approach had to be embraced. Substantially they take a position which considers architecture a social tool, not an hegemonic ideology nor a rational discipline for satisfying the higher classes.

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<sup>8</sup> The three principles proposed by Herdoiza, were both anticipatory for the time, but also strongly related to the ancestral Ecuadorian culture. Citizens inclusion, participation, respect for nature and beauty...can be conducive to the indigenous *Sumak Kausai*, but also to the *Buen Vivir* as conceived 40 years later by the Ecuadorian Constitution (Howtard, 2011).

## 2.4 Cultural influences



**TISDYC handbook n°5, 1976**

Elaborated by the student of the FAU, UC, Quito

Reflecting on social theories, probably also influenced by the fact that Wilson Herdoiza at the time was doing a PhD in social sciences in the Sorbonne of Paris, European approaches coming from different disciplines, mainly lined up with the left, were considered by the students reference points for a revolutionary approach.

Once, in their second handbook for example, they quote the French sociologist Alain Touraine, and reviewing his theories on Cultural Movements; we can clearly see his strong influence on this students' organization from the other side of the world. In Touraine's *Post-Industrial Society* (1971) indeed, social movements are those able to orient the economy by planting seeds to build a new model; those who are capable through their battles to underline the catastrophe of the capitalistic

economical system (Battiston, 2011). On this issue, in the TISDYC handbook number 5 at page 33, there is an article written by Wilson Herdoiza titled *Breve Reseña sobre la Política Urbana* that can be translated as 'Short Review on Urban Policy', where he points out that urban policies cannot be conceived by the dominant classes, but rather through the urban claims for land, water and housing, of the social movements and masses organizations.

In their third volume instead they criticize Althusser, the French philosopher, for denying the possibility of the small bourgeois to fight together with the proletariat, which is what they rather see as their duty.

Still concerning cultural influences, moreover, their TISDYC handbook number 5 of 1976 opens with the Spanish translation of *Fragmentary Sciences and Urban Reality* by Henry Lefebvre, now available in the volume *Writings of cities* (1996). In this short essay Lefebvre states that in order to face the representation of the global from an urban perspective, there is a need of 'interdisciplinary tactic'. He explains that, until that moment, for each science that wanted to contribute in the description of the city, economists, geographers, climatologist, etc. were providing just fragments according to their specialties; but he underlines that there is a "quite recent practice...which tends to become global by gathering all the facts of experience and knowledge, namely, planning" (ibid.: 95). Planning for Lefebvre is defined as a social practice supported by confrontation and gathering of fragments, in brief, is interdisciplinary. And if we go back to the discourse of professor Herdoiza in 1990, as above mentioned, new professionals need to have scientific, political, technical and artistic training, giving so in the TISDYC workshops, a great role to multidisciplinary.

Finally, in the concluding part of the same booklet, we find Lefebvre again with the Spanish translation of *Philosophy of the City and Planning Ideology*. Talking of planning as ideology, even if related to society, he warns, can easily turn into a mere technical science, where all problems of society are formulated into questions of space without conceiving its capacity to become an harmonious context. Which is what students of architecture and urbanism of the Universidad Central mention various times while planning Comité del Pueblo: "it has to be conceived as a qualitative space related to the adequate entailment of the planners with the popular sector" (TISDYC n°5, 1976: 18). In the same booklet they specify that the workshop considers two fundamental ways to reach qualitative knowledge, both for the urban design and for the development of the University's Reform. From one side, the participation of the students in the class struggle is linked with the popular masses and from the other, is a systematic obtainment of data, crossings, quantifications, etc. Passing as well from structural consideration on the specific society that will inhabit the new neighborhood, to economic, political and ideological aspects, ending with technical issues related to building techniques, materials infrastructure and spatial organization.

## 3 TISDYC IN PRACTICE

### 3.1 The description of the Project

At the beginning, the first TISDYC workshop was constituted by one teacher, one assistant and sixty students. The responsibility that Herdoiza and his fellows had was felt as an enormous challenge from two perspectives. From one side, as previously explained, for its political, symbolic and revolutionary potential, but more technically, from the other, for the palpable complexity and magnitude of such project; not indeed

just the definition of some general guidelines with some architectural details, but an enormous machine of design, citizens' involvement and physical construction of the neighborhood.

The effective work started at mid November 1973 and the plots were delivered to the families on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January of the next year; a tour de force lasted only two months.

Discarding any kind of utopia and looking at basic demand, what was asked the university was to collaborate in building a neighborhood for 4.5000 families (23.000 people) which probably could have doubled in ten years. Students and professors had to consider that 65% of this mass, was completely excluded from accessing any possible institutional fund and in most of the cases didn't have any kinds of saving. Furthermore, aside the extremely low investment capacity and time to develop and realize the project, the greatest lack was the historical inexperience to face such threat. At the time indeed, there wasn't an adequate academic knowledge, neither a specific methodology, to link the academia with the popular sector. Moreover must be underlined that in Ecuador this was one of the first most elaborated and biggest involvement of the university in housing the poor. As we will see, the lack of references and the will to establish a new methodology, made this pioneer case dominated by a strict and organized structure. In a practical way, in order to face the many aspects of the project, as inquiries, infrastructure calculations, housing prototype design, etc., they formulated departments, blocks and groups of students and professors, organized in 'horizontal' and 'vertical' coordinating systems that could concentrate in different specific fields.

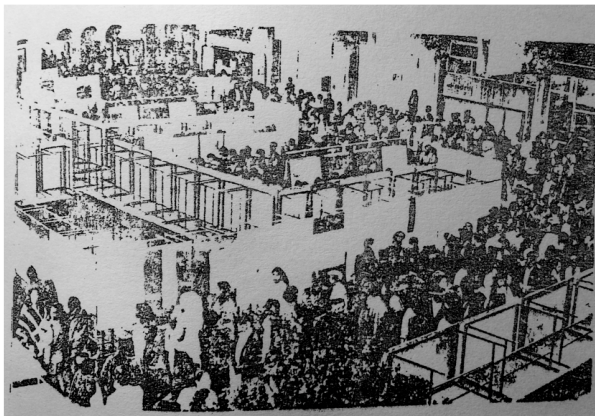
### 3.1.1 Inside and outside the university

The work was developed partially inside the university and for the rest was spent on site. In the university were done the calculations, the design and the collection of inquiries, while outside was the ground where do investigation, organization of conferences and finally actively participate in *mingas*.

### 3.1.2 No standards

Considering the three base principles of the TISDYC: create university mechanisms for scientific research, form a new type of professional and relate the university to the masses and popular organization; building standards, as they were conceived by the municipality, were rejected. What the group wanted to envision, was a way of going ahead the fixed dimensions of sidewalks, circulation ways, building unit form, etc., because in their optic everything had to be reconsidered starting from a deep knowledge of the needs of the new inhabitants. A collection of information that has never been done before, and from which all the design would have depended.

### 3.1.3 Inquiries



Popular sector in the Faculty of Architecture  
TISDYC N°3, p.33

One of the most striking aspects of this new model, were indeed the inquiries that the students had prepared. Engraved on sheets of iron and then printed on big papers and disposed in various classes of the FAU, questionnaires were ready for each family to be filled in. Questions were referred to the formulation of the family, number of members, age, sex, education, income, which kind of job the parents were doing and in which part of the city. The new inhabitants were asked as well to describe their actual house and if they were able to construct and work in team. In the summer of 2015, talking with an old dweller of Comité del Pueblo, which still lives there and took part at all the process of its foundation, he confessed that he remembered very well when the families were invited to the faculty of architecture to fulfill the questionnaires. From his perspective was a great honor to enter and be involved with such institution. This

documentation aspect indeed, a part from being a great collection of precious data to guide the project, was also an act of direct openness from the academia to the social sectors. Finally, collected all the inquiries, in order to be usable, overall the information concerning the inhabitants' existing shelter, was delivered to the Calculation Center of the University, who after codifying it, returned it back to the faculty of Architecture and Urbanism.

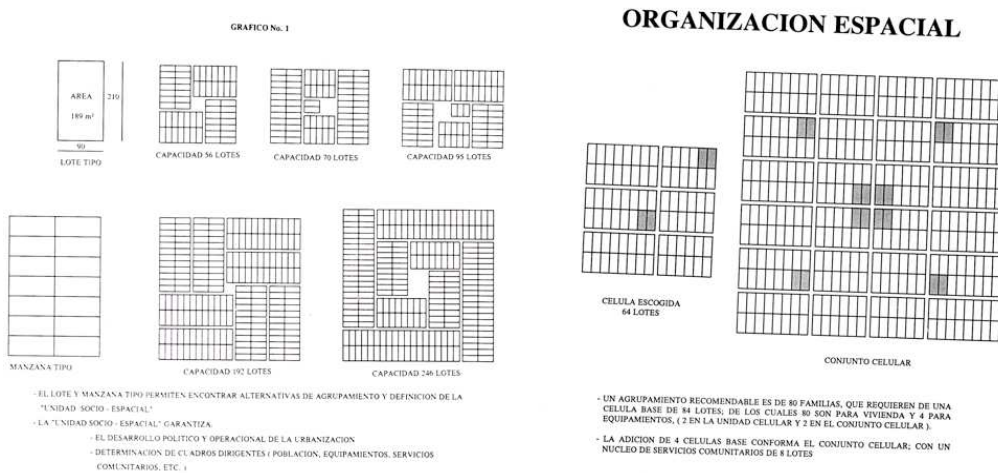
### 3.1.4 Topography

Looking then specifically at Hacienda Eloisa and its topography, another group of students, by consulting existing documents that were describing the ground of the site, identified different kinds of areas, distinguishing between almost flat ones, sloppy ones and two big canyons surrounding the Hacienda in the southwest and northeast. Later on, defined the areas suitable for housing and the ones not, two different proposals have been formulated.

A first one was seen the planning of two independent and “self-sufficient” areas, each of which depending from different cities; one from Quito and the other from Calderon. And a second case, the one that was finally chosen, was seen the planning of the two areas, the higher and the lower, with shared facilities located between the two. In this case, the unique compound would have been a territorial unity dependent entirely to the city of Quito.

### 3.1.5 The division of the plots / the decision of the grid

At the time of envisioning the physical structure of the neighborhood, considering the 140 ha of Hacienda Eloisa, one of the first steps was the decision of the size of the plots. Knowing the amount of inhabitants they had to host, they decided that the easiest and most effective way to divide the land, was through multiples and submultiples of a base model. Considering the housing the most important element of the neighborhood, for the students and professors what was relevant to know, was understanding which kinds of activities were going to be practiced in the houses; comprehending hence the spaces for sleeping, eating, relaxing, cleaning...making a distinction between funding activates and complementary ones; the data collected through the inquires in this case was crucial. So, looking at the needs, they established a 'greatest common divisor' which was a module of 3 meters by 3 meters. After looking at different possibilities they concluded that the final dimension of the plot was going to be of 189 square meters equals to 9 meters by 21. The built morphology decided, is finally the grid<sup>9</sup>. In order to understand the precise agglomeration of plots into cells, another group, who was focusing on the equipments needed at the difference scales, was consulted.



### Plots, cells and platforms: preparatory hypothesis and the final platform

Herdoiza 1996, p.109, 110

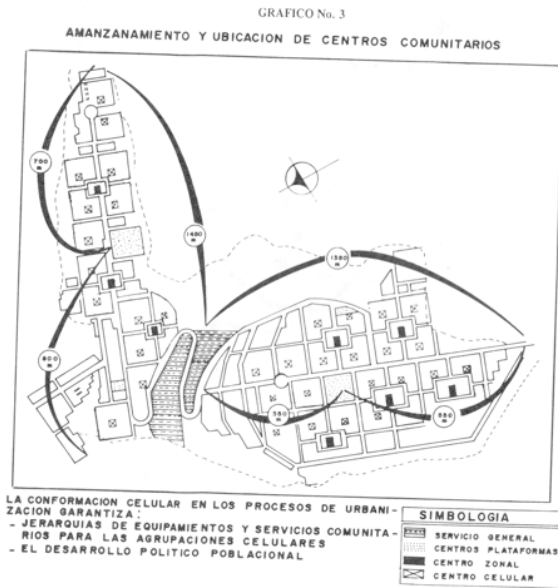
### 3.1.6 Equipments

In the handbook number 5, other students indeed described the different kinds of services needed, making a distinction between the local ones, that would be part of the cell (dimension of 8 plots by 6 plots), the ones for more users at the platform level and the biggest ones with a radius of influence for all CdP.

All services had to be reachable by every house at a walking distance, for example the biggest ones needed to be attainable with no more than 20-25 minutes walking and the equipments at the platform level with a walk of no more than 10-12 minutes.

<sup>9</sup> An aspect, the one of the grid, which can be related to a vast urban literature as an inheritance of the colonial times (Lopez Moreno, 2001; Mazza, 2015), but yet contradictive respect the students' will of taking distance from urban standards. This morphological urban decision is also highly criticize by Antonela Fustillos (chapter 3.9.1) in her interview. She sees this urban form, more than the result of a 'new architect' conception, better an own-goal respect the critic the university movement does about Le Corbusier's rigidity (TYSIDIC N°5, 1976).

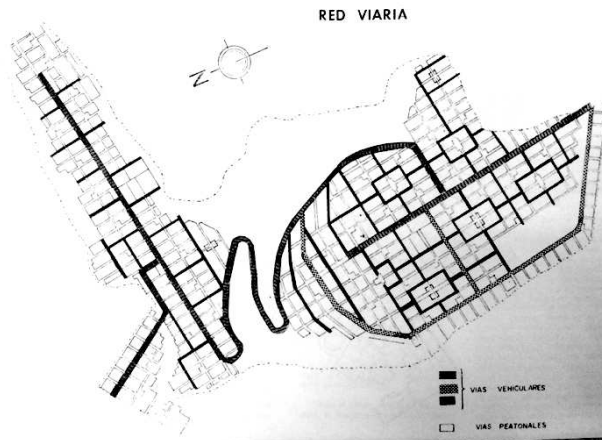




**Walking time to reach community centers**  
Herdoiza 1996, p.111

to gain technical information, as dimensions of beds, common areas, etc. from were start reflecting on the formulation of the new ones for Comité del Pueblo. It wasn't indeed a copy of the existing, but better a critical reading of qualities and shortcomings to be reinterpreted; following therefore the principle of not relying on municipal standards.

### 3.1.7 Roads & Productive Areas



**Roads network**  
TISDYC N5, p.28

For the simplest plots' unit, the cell, they envisioned communal services as laundries and showers, 66 square meters hall for socio-cultural activities and 235 square meters for sport activities; everything reachable with an action radius of 80-160 meters. The calculations were painstaking, for example for the showers they defined an amount of 11 per cell, imagining 28 daily turns, satisfying the needs of 7 families a day and 80 families a week (making specific exceptions for Saturdays and Sundays) (TISDYCn5, 1976: 26).

At the platform level then they describe the localization of schools, gardens, kindergartens, community halls and small health centers. While at the biggest neighborhood level, they identified the need of two high-schools, a scientific one and one of modern humanities, an hospital, a politic-sport center for mass reunions, a space for fairs and markets and the main green areas for recreation and sports. Another unique aspect about the planning of the services and equipments, was a 'brigade' of students who was responsible for visiting existing facilities in other parts of the city, for example clinics and kindergartens. This was done

Concerning the road network we don't have much information, but we can see the distinction they made between pedestrian (the majority) and vehicular ones. As we can notice from the following image, there is a good accessibility to Comité del Pueblo from Quito in the southern part through Avenida Jorge Garces, but a weak connectivity to Calderon from the northern area of the neighborhood: the fringe which still nowadays is denominated '*la bota*' (the shoe).

The stronger connection with the Ecuadorian capital was conceived mainly because new inhabitants could have continued their jobs in the city. Student envisioned, probably with not much foresight, that if families wanted to establish smaller commercial activities in La Eloisa, they could, but probably would have been simply auxiliary, due to the small demand they could

ever expected. A choice, the one of not including productive areas in the project, that unfortunately, as we'll see later on, will affect negatively the economic livelihood of the neighborhood<sup>10</sup>.

### 3.1.8 Infrastructure

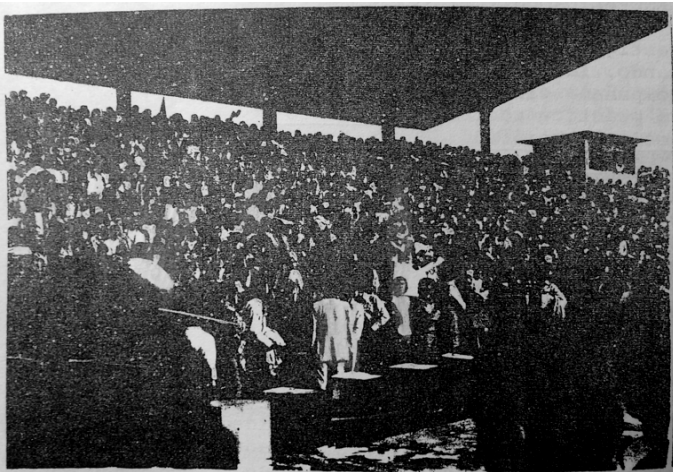
Referring to other kinds of infrastructure as sewage, water, light and telephone connections, the designers knew clearly that the State would have never invest in such area, because future inhabitants were part of low

<sup>10</sup> Comité del Pueblo neighborhood, for being promoted by a left-wing party, self-constructed and designed by an architect, can be compared to the case of Villa el Salvador in Peru. In Villa el Salvador though, an entire sector was planned as industrial, which was a farsighted choice that still nowadays supports the local economy. (Sotelo, 1994)

classes, while these kinds of investments normally reached only the higher rankings of the society. Knowing as well that an entire system could have never been financed by the committee and neither private inhabitants could have ever donate an equal amount for the collective infrastructure, students limited their work in envisioning traces that could have had a negligible cost of realization, depreciable over time by each family. Non orthodox then, but better transitory solution that each family could have applied independently on their capital investment. About this aspect hasn't been found any drawing or diagram that envisions how these connections could have been; aspect which makes thinking that maybe the student have never planned them but, as happens in most self-built neighborhoods in Latin America (Ward, 2014), were totally delegated to the ingenuity of the inhabitants.

### 3.1.9 The delivery of the plots

The 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1974 the rector of the Universidad Central and the deans of the various faculties, participated to the delivery of the plots to the 4500 families. From the tales of Wilson Herdoiza's wife, professor Antonela Fustillos<sup>11</sup>, that one was a very important day. All members involved in this huge process were invited to the stadium of Quito. The people waiting to know the number of their new plot were elegantly dressed and for every number communicated through the megaphone, a burst of applause filled the stadium. The ownership of plots was decided through a draw.



The meeting in the stadium of Quito  
TISDYC N2, p.19

In that 2 months between the assignation of the task to the FAU and the delivery of the plots to the citizens, just a general drawing of the neighborhood was designed. It was then, in the three consequent years, that students of different cycles, worked in *mingas* and developed all the ideas and calculations just explained. For students that worked on it in 1976 for example, the case of Comité del Pueblo was just a expedient to train in proposing design solution for low income sectors, not as the beginning, where the proposals had to be feasible in order to be immediately built.

As mentioned at the beginning though, the TISDYC module lasted for more than three decades and the methodology has been applied in many different context, always with the same basic principle though: fight alongside the popular sector.

### 3.1.10 The *mingas* for building the neighborhood

Plots assigned, before all studies based on inquires concerning facilities, housing prototypes, public spaces, etc. were completed, there was a strong pressure from the members of the committee to start building their dream: their house. However, Comité del Pueblo was not simply a parceling plan, but a project of solidarity between the new coming citizens, the Marxist Leninist Party and the FAU, therefore there wasn't much space for an individualistic perspective.

Due to economic limitations, was obviously not imaginable to simply call a construction company to build the cornerstones of the project, but neither was imaginable to wait any longer. The history of community work of the future inhabitants was at this point crucial<sup>12</sup>, and student, even if initially were called just to design the plan, didn't arrest their personal and active involvement<sup>13</sup>; another aspect that can be counted among the most relevant and interesting of this case. We have in fact to consider that the collective work to build a neighborhood of 23000 inhabitants is not of little value, not only at the Ecuadorian level, but certainly also globally.

<sup>11</sup> interview made in Quito on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2015

<sup>12</sup> As Plöger writes: "social deprivation and the desire for progress were significant drivers for community mobilization and collective action" in all Latin American countries (Plöger, 2012: 214). But in this specific Andean case, we must consider that most of Comité's members were farmers used to work collectively mainly for agricultural purposes, or if coming from more urban contexts, were as well used to practice the *minga* for paving roads, building a communal house,... A costume that is intrinsically part of their culture. (Guevara, 1957)

<sup>13</sup> A pro-active attitude hard to find anywhere else. Even if the university revolution during the late 60's mid 70's had a worldwide eco, in the case of the Universidad Central, wasn't simply a protest or a proposal, but a tangible realization.



**A Students working on site**  
TISDYC N°5, p.16 and 19

In the days of *minga*, students were divided in sectors and together with the community were organizing the work to be implemented. After dialoguing with the inhabitants, they were personally contributing in deforesting and cleaning the area, trace the roads, flatten the earth, etc. (Fassin, 1991)

A team-work of great responsibility, considering overall that before this case, students of architecture weren't really used to actively manage such scale; even if professor Herdoiza was still the main responsible for the entire thing in question. However there were aspects that couldn't have been designed neither developed. At page 30 of the 5<sup>th</sup> TISDYC handbook, indeed students write: "We could have planned big markets, hospitals, schools according to the best techniques and functionality, but these drawings would have never had the chance to be built...therefore facilities will take shape just depending on to the economic resource of the community". Before instead, at page 15, the justification in not intervening in the design of such aspects, is more political, because they say: by envisioning the actual realization of the project through an active communitarian work, members can keep themselves bonded, allowing as well the orderly implementation of a political program. In respect to this point, even if they don't mention it, also an issue of scale might had play a role.

PROPUESTAS ARQUITECTONICAS  
VIVIENDAS PROGRESIVAS PARA EL PROLETARIADO



**VIVIENDAS ADOBADAS**  
PROPUESTA CON DUCHA COLECTIVA



**Architectonical proposal**  
Herdoiza 1996, p.114.



**CdP at the end of the 70's**  
Godard, 1980. Pag. 163

Houses though, even if some models were conceptually designed according to the 'class' of the inhabitants (proletarian, middle-class, etc.), were never built by the students and when the people realized them by themselves, didn't follow any precise guideline; each dwelling indeed was built over time by each family, with their own techniques and means.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4 COMITE DEL PUEBLO NOW

##### Reflections of the actual situation

Having worked on this case for almost four years, little by little, the FAU concluded the involvement with Comité del Pueblo, deciding to concentrate on other cases in need of their precious, free, not just technical, support.

Making a time-shift, walking through the neighborhood nowadays, can be particularly astonishing. In little more than 40 years, it evolved rapidly and it is hard to recognize that it had such a different history from any other post-informal settlements of the city of Quito.

##### 4.1 How it looks now

As soon as the university came off the neighborhood, people started selling parts of their plots to other members of their family, friends or strangers; causing in this way the fulfillment of buildings of the entire property.

On patterns of densification, Godard making a comparison with the Guasmo neighborhood in Guayaquil, result of a similar process of parceling plan, but an illegal one, argues that between the two, Comité del Pueblo faced a process of consolidation which brought a much stronger densification due to the fact of plots subdivision and sublease. Aspect that in the Guasmo didn't happen, plausibly for a different mindset, that was seeing improper the fragmentation of the plot, as it was supposed to remain a patrimony for the children. (Godard, 1988)

The same happened for public spaces and common sites located in the nucleuses of the cells. Someone illegally declared the ownership of these areas and sold them to build more housing at the expense of the entire community, who therefore became deprived of the ground for schools, playgrounds, communal halls, parks, etc. This aspect is still very much felt today, that the neighborhood has been entirely legalized by the municipality of Quito, that the roads have been paved, electricity, water and sewage connections established.

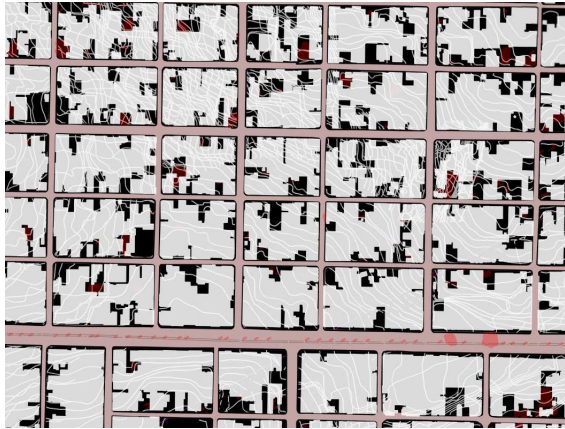


Ortho-photo 23 October 1979  
Ecuadorian IGM archive



Ortho-photo 22 December 1988  
Ecuadorian IGM archive

<sup>14</sup> A part from envisioning in numbers the probable inhabitant growth for the future, we cannot really find a students' reflection on possible modifications of housing units in time. Which by authors like John Turner, designing housing as a progressive unit, was already a must-do step since already various years. On this aspect, it is neither clear if a mix between classes was envisioned.



**More recent times**  
By the author from IGM Dwg 2010



**Actual situation**  
Google maps 2016

The densification process indeed has been impressive, in 1974 there were 23.000 inhabitants and now there are almost six times more, namely 120.000 and, as we can see in the following image, it can count with many buildings with 4, 5 or even 6 floors.



**Images of Comité del Pueblo**  
Taken by the author. 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015

Since the 70's Comité del Pueblo was the main popular neighborhood of Quito, both in extension and population (Godard, 1988) and more than a neighborhood nowadays, it has the numbers of a city in the city; it became indeed one of the 32 parishes of Quito. For being a city though it should have had its own productive areas, which as we saw, were never planned. Godard on this respect says: "it looks like a 'dormitory suburb' where the scarcity of equipments and services is worrying". (ibid.: p.87) As a matter of fact, most inhabitants still now work in the city, so that the dependency to Quito during peak hours unleashes severe traffic congestion. (Maximy, 2000) This aspect however is caused also because when roads were planned, too many were thought as pedestrian ones, without envisioning that, 30 years later, almost every family would possess at least a car. It should be also recall that it is still a rather isolated parish, commonly portrayed as one of the most violent in the capital. (ibid.)

#### 4.2 Why did it happen? Some assumptions

Despite not going to look minutely case-by-case, to understand why Comité del Pueblo doesn't look and functions as an outstanding and revolutionary neighborhood, which is not the aim of this paper, we can certainly make some assumptions.

Probably one of the main aspects that got lost through time, a part from the faithful physical realization of the plan, is the spirit of collectivity and overall solidarity between the members. Even if the political aim of the

project was far from been utopian, but better was defended as a feasible long-term project, something went wrong and individuality seems to have won over collectivity<sup>15</sup>.

It is here considered that, at the time, this might have happened due to the fact of not having left much space to the people to organize themselves. From Bravo's point of view indeed, the Comité as a political movement, adopted a structure very similar to the so called 'democratic centralism' of Leninist origin, which served to justify and legitimate a vertical and authoritarian structure, where participation was minimal and reduced to execute the solutions coming from the top. He insists on the fact that citizens were controlled by the party and that the participatory attitude was limited. The attempts to sensitize the people from the base indeed were not stimulated, curtailing hence creativity and imagination. (Bravo, 1980; Garcia, 1985)

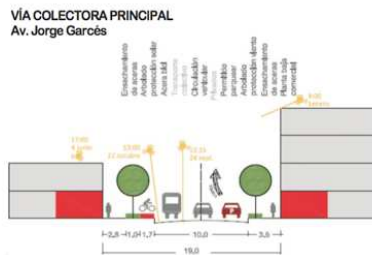
There were then other political contradictions, like the fact that the political leaders were chosen by the party's board and not by the people and that citizens were obliged to participate to meetings and *mingas*. (ibid.) This last aspect is also described by Godard, but it is justified as, by doing so, inhabitants were constantly mobilized. (Godard, 1988)

It should be also recalled that the Marxist Leninist Communist Party, due to internal disagreements, weakened and lost the great power acquired at the beginning of the 70's, thus not fulfilling the role of accompanying the growth of neighborhood leaders; substantial, overall in Latin American contexts, for an equilibrated and honest neighborhood course, sharp against the infringements and defender of the common good.

Looking finally at the other main actor: the university, it's hard to criticize the perseverance, completeness and integrity of the students' work, but maybe the over regulation - lets just think about the above-mentioned example of the showers – coupled with the simultaneous consciousness of not been able to realized what was planned due to economic restrictions, created a gap, perhaps avoidable if incremental stratagems would have been imagined.

### 4.3 Aspirations for the future

Looking for understating which has been the role of the State in the process of consolidation of Comité del Pueblo, we can see that the legalization of the neighborhood started in 1986, that infrastructure as water, electricity and sewerage, even if some year later, were established and that few services as the schools and the medical centre were implemented. However, there is still a great lack of public spaces, green areas, services and productive sites, adding to this that the implementations of programs for citizens' involvement are inexistent<sup>16</sup>. By looking at the programs proposed by the Secretary of Territory, Habitat and Housing of the Metropolitan District of Quito for Comité del Pueblo in the last two years, the proposals are at the same time minimal but giant. An oxymoron which imagines the introduction of trees on the sidewalk of the main road, av. Jorge Garces, which cuts the neighborhood from North to South, but also the removal of the entire group of informal commerce traditionally located all along it.



**Section for Av. Jorge Garcés**  
Secretaría T.H.V. (2014: p.172)



**Informal commerce**  
By the author 2<sup>nd</sup> September '15



**New market**  
El Quiteño n°407, 2015

The authorities see the informal commerce as an improper occupation of public space, receptacle of delinquency and disorder. For this reason an indoor-market has been built in the northern part of the Comité, where escalators, security cameras, banks and pharmacies are disposed. The market opened its doors on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015. In order to obtain a little spot where to sell their products traders have to pay a rent

<sup>15</sup> Completely different perspective can be seen in Villa el Salvador in which the CUAVER (Comunidad Urbana Autogestionaria de Villa El Salvador) had a strong political role for decades (Sotelo, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Since the amendment of the recent Ecuadorian Constitution of the *Buen Vivir* (2008) envisions the need to foster the participation of the citizens in the Ecuadorian development (Constitution: title III cap2; title VI cap.2, title VII cap.1)

and taxes, which for most of the sellers, overall *campesinos* who sell local fruit and vegetable, is economically unattainable. A process of urban hygiene strongly contested by the popular sector, which by been expropriated from the street, sees their only economical income, but also their socio-cultural identity deprived.

## 5 COOPERATION RECONSIDERED

Having given an overview on political, methodological and design bases on which Comité del Pueblo was founded and having offered a general panorama of its actual situation, we can argue that this case is more than just a neighborhood located in the north-east of the city of Quito. CdP is a rich history of social struggle, legality and solidarity between actors that, until establishing their alliance, were subsisting separately in their own sphere; thousands and thousands of poor and marginalized Ecuadorian people abandoned by the institutions, a poorly supported extremist left-wing party and a faculty of architecture and urbanism trapped in a redundant and conservative optics. The decision of facing together the spirit of revenge and the will of change that the three shared, created a unique and revolutionary case of inclusion.

Certainly this case cannot be just eulogized for each aspect of the academic methodology built up by professor Herdoiza and his students, which at times, was over complicated and strict. Moreover it has been noted that the political ideology under the communist perspective, at moments, limited the autonomy of the individuals. And in final stance, must be also remarked that the absence of governmental institutions, the lack of regulation and economical support, has been strongly detrimental for its development, bringing Cdp to the chaotic and socially unjust neighborhood which is now.

However, this contribution wanted to uncover the originality of this case for having been able to open up quite unexplored paths for the time; precisely for the radical reflection on the social role of the urban designer. A perspective very actual still nowadays (Boano, 2014; Cruz, 2015), considering that take distance from top-down development, involve citizens' in participatory processes and learn from bottom-up practices, are principles which are now often recalled, also from institutional perspectives.

At the time therefore, we can say that this cutting-age relation citizens/institutions/urban-space, was represented by the pedagogical role of the university in enhancing the interchange between academia and the social sector; while nowadays, this institutional opening towards people, can be catch in some aspects of the *Buen Vivir* Constitution. Precisely the 'right to the city' principle that appears in the article 31 of such treaty, in this sense opens the doors to renewed interactions between institutions and the citizens<sup>17</sup>. And Comité del Pueblo, even if more than forty years are passed, can be still considered as one of the few attempts to satisfy the right, as Lefebvre conceived, in the city of Quito; not indeed just the right to citizens to access to the services that the city offers, but the right to reshape the city under their own needs (Lefebvre, 1974).

In conclusion it is considered that this case could function as a litmus paper, able to inspire citizens, politicians, urban designers, activists and universities; a possible influence to conceive contemporary, but culturally integrated, inclusive participatory processes. A way to change the trend of the actual government of resorting forensic participatory methodologies, oblivious to the Ecuadorian cultural and social setting<sup>18</sup>, in defense of more choral and less abstract strategies. 'Spatial-cooperation' should be therefore reconsidered, and historical dynamics and cultural practices, as the tradition of the *minga*, the multidisciplinary relations between stakeholders and the citizens' involvement in the various steps of implementation are seen as precious legacies for its Ecuadorian reformulation.

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<sup>17</sup> A principle that was previously institutionalized in the Brazilian Constitution (2001), in the 'Urban Agenda' of UN HABITAT (2004), in the World Urban Forum in Barcelona (2005), and that finally appeared as well in 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution. Respect to the position of the state in the 70's, this stance can be considered very positive, but also as Mayer states, might be misleading, as it's a concept opened to multiple interpretations and with its institutionalization, the activist spirit attributed to it by its creator Henry Lefebvre, got easily lot (Mayer, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Reference is give to the participatory processes proposed by the municipality of Quito in the pilot case of La Floresta neighborhood. The municipality hired a group of architects called Mecanica Urbana, that by following to the letter Jane Jacobs' directives, and skating-over the neighborhood cultural background, involve the inhabitants in exclusive, consultative (not really participatory) meetings, ending often with reductive post-it conceptualization and ephemeral hipster tactical-urbanism outcomes.

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