

Near half of the four million inhabitants of Caracas live in informal settlements or "barrios", in self built houses or "ranchos". As the city is located in a long valley and the formal sector already occupies the flat land, many of the "barrios" are over the mountains surrounding it. At night and from far, their lights magically illuminate the hills giving our city one of its most beautiful features.

But from inside the reality is harsh



Projectos Arquí 5 C.A. Silvia Soenets Maria Ines Pocaterra Isabel Pocaterra Victor Gastier www.arqui5.com



inaccessibility • deficient sanitary infrastructure • lack of public buildings • instability • high density • no identity

Upgrading SAN RAFAEL - UNIDO

Integral Urban Project La Vega Caracas Venezuela

CARACAS SCALE 1:75000 0 2 4 Km.
Among the Latin American capital cities, Caracas is the densest. There are vast informal settlements all around the city, and smaller ones inserted inside it.

LA VEGA
Is one of the biggest and oldest spontaneous settlements of Caracas. The history of the town of La Vega started early in the twentieth century, but only in the sixties the real expansion began. Nowadays, in La Vega reside more than 100,000 people.

Due to its level of consolidation, and because the land belongs to public institutions, La Vega was selected to start the upgrading program in large scale.

INITIAL SITUATION
Whit 26 Ha. and 5000 inhabitants, this is the smallest sector of La Vega. There is one main road, Carretera Negra that communicates with the rest of La Vega, and two secondary ones, one in San Rafael, the other in Barrio Unido. These are very narrow and extremely steeply, and are in two stream-beds. The highest point is 150 m. above the lower one.

DIAGNOSTIC
The lack of accessibility is the main problem: the farther from the roads, the worse become the houses, both in the construction quality and their connection to the sanitary network. There are no public buildings. The settlement is separated in two "barrios", and the inhabitants of each one distrust those who live in the other.

PROPOSAL
The urban proposal includes a new road system that goes outside the settlement. This organization minimizes the houses to be demolished, establishes a strong border, and improves the accessibility of the higher zones. Alongside the new road there are plots for public buildings. The existing roads cannot be enhanced, but they and a new street form a ring for public transport and emergency vehicles.

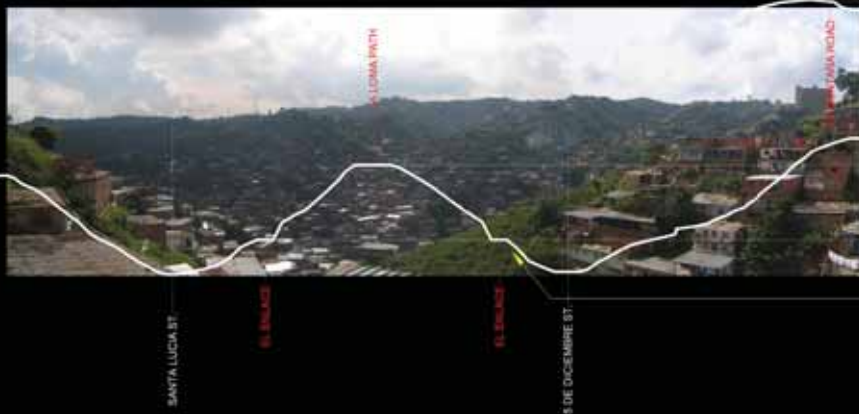
URBAN DESIGN CONCEPTS SCALE 1:5000 0 100 200 300m.

Ethical standards and social equity Contextual response and aesthetic impact Ecological quality and energy saving

THE HISTORY OF THE PROJECT DESIGNING WITH THE PEOPLE

1999 In October, the National Council for Housing organized a competition to select architects to work in several barrios in Caracas. Before presenting the proposals, all the participants attended to a course to settle a common framework for the projects, the National Program for the Upgrading of Informal Settlements. Our team won in San Rafael-Unido.

2000 The initial contract included the Site Analysis the Urban Design and the project for a first construction to be built. As the community should participate in the whole process the neighbors were summoned for a general meeting to explain the Upgrading Program and present the technical team. Since this moment the executive agency was CAMEBA working with a World Bank loan.

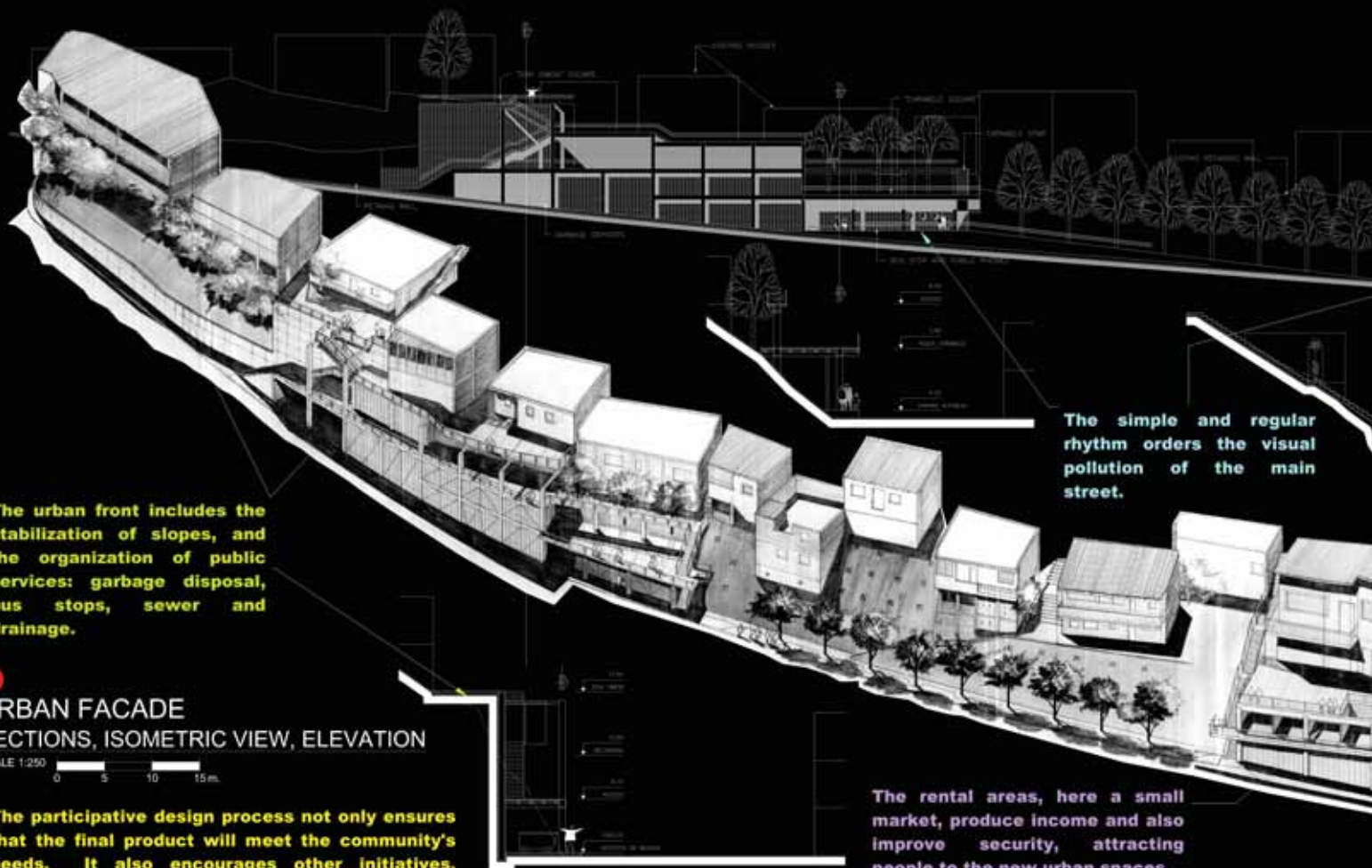


The new road network, although not achieves the initial goal of having a street each 8 stories in height, makes the settlement function top-down, facilitating the access to the sectors that are now more isolated.



The clay bricks are used in different types and formats to characterize the spaces. The material facilitates the maintenance.

1
SECONDARY SCHOOL
ELEVATION SCALE 1:200 0 5 10 15m



The urban front includes the stabilization of slopes, and the organization of public services: garbage disposal, bus stops, sewer and drainage.

The simple and regular rhythm orders the visual pollution of the main street.

The rental areas, here a small market, produce income and also improve security, attracting people to the new urban spaces.

F
URBAN FACADE
SECTIONS, ISOMETRIC VIEW, ELEVATION
SCALE 1:250 0 5 10 15m

The participative design process not only ensures that the final product will meet the community's needs. It also encourages other initiatives, related or not with the physical environment.

Quantum change and transferability **Economic performance and compatibility** **Ethical standards and social equity**

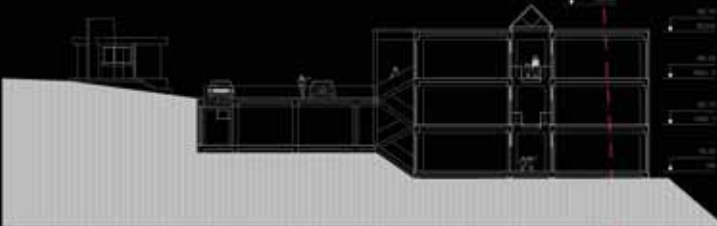


As the project was advancing, the technical and social teams became familiar with the neighborhood and its people. The settlement was studied in detail, with plans, aerial and historical photos and many site visits. The urban design concepts proposed in the competition were elaborated as more information was available. The community was reported to in small local meetings, where the specific problems were exposed



The educational buildings, sport facilities and private uses together with the new roads, define a border, to prevent the expansion of the informal occupation.

The social club protects the entrance to the Recreational Park.
 This plot is over a big fill that was created to compensate the cuts generated for the roads.



J
PRIMARY SCHOOL
 SECTION SCALE 1:200

0 5 10 15m

The sport center is associated with the secondary school so that the institution is in charge of its maintenance. However, each use can function independently.



The small squares are designed as balconies to allow the community surveillance.



G
"EL ENLACE" ROAD
HOUSES TO DEMOLISH

If a house must be removed, it was identified to be replaced with an apartment. When possible, only slightly consolidated houses were touched.

Contextual response and aesthetic impact **Ecological quality and energy saving** **Quantum change and transferability**



2001

The Urban design and the Substitute Houses projects were finished, and a new general meeting was held, to formally approve the project. Before the meeting, new field visits were organized, to ensure everybody had known about the project and understood it. In the visits, the inhabitants had the opportunity of seeing the project's plans in more detail.

Residential developments located in private land will help to co-finance the new roads, which represent the main investment. This kind of public-private and formal-informal partnership could be used to define the borders of other "barrios".



The public buildings provide focal points, a sense of place in the monotonous existing urban tissue.



F URBAN FACADE: CURRENT SITUATION, WITH PROBLEMS OF INSTABILITY, PRECARIOUS SERVICES, GARBAGE AND VISUAL POLLUTION. THIS IS THE FACE OF SAN RAFAEL-UNIDO TO THE REST OF LA VEGA.

Economic performance and compatibility Ethical standards and social equity Contextual response and aesthetic impact



F MARCH 19th. GENERAL ASSEMBLY. WITH NEAR 300 ATTENDANTS IT WAS THE BIGGEST MEETING ORGANIZED FOR THE PROJECT



August 7th: the first stair was inaugurated. This stair was built without project and the experience was used later in the development of the rest of the stairs. Again, the community was informed about the scope of the program, and the achievements in other "barrios".



In 2001 several stairs were built, as pilot projects. They show at what extent the environment can be improved. The stairs are in green in the site plan. The lessons learned in these stairs were used later in the Integral Project. The major lessons were about construction processes and bill of materials.



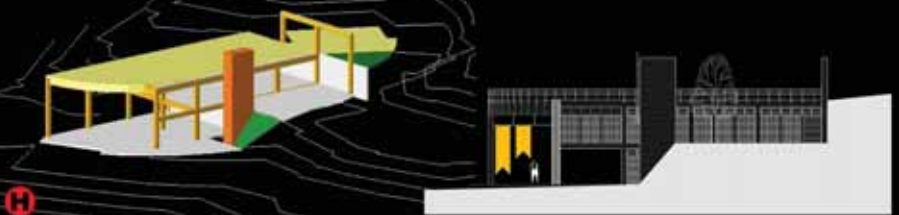
The improvement is not only physical, the community takes and uses the new spaces immediately, and the houses in the neighborhood are also enhanced.



This area, "Cerro Las Madres" is unstable and dangerous, and the project recommended demolishing the few existing houses.



In september 2005 part of the mountain collapsed, destroying several houses, this shows how urgent are the problems.



H COMUNAL CENTER (2)
STRUCTURAL SQUEME AND FACADE

SCALE 1:200 0 5 10 15 m.

All the public buildings are conceived as landmarks, still keeping the simplicity of structure and materials.

As the community lacks of a large enough meeting place, the Communal Center was located early in the construction program.



E COMUNAL CENTER (1)
GROUND FLOOR AND ELEVATION

SCALE 1:200 0 5 10 15 m.

All the common buildings have rental spaces to ensure their sustainability. In this case, is a pharmacy that solves a need and generates income for the residents association.



A SUBSTITUTE DWELLINGS
ELEVATION AND APARTMENTS

SCALE 1:200 0 5 10 15 m.

There are a variety of apartments looking for ease the negotiation with the families whose houses should be substituted.



The image of the new apartment buildings respects the small grain of the existing constructions.

Ecological quality and energy saving Quantum change and transferability Economic performance and compatibility



AUGUST 2001, "4 DE DICIEMBRE" STAIR

2002

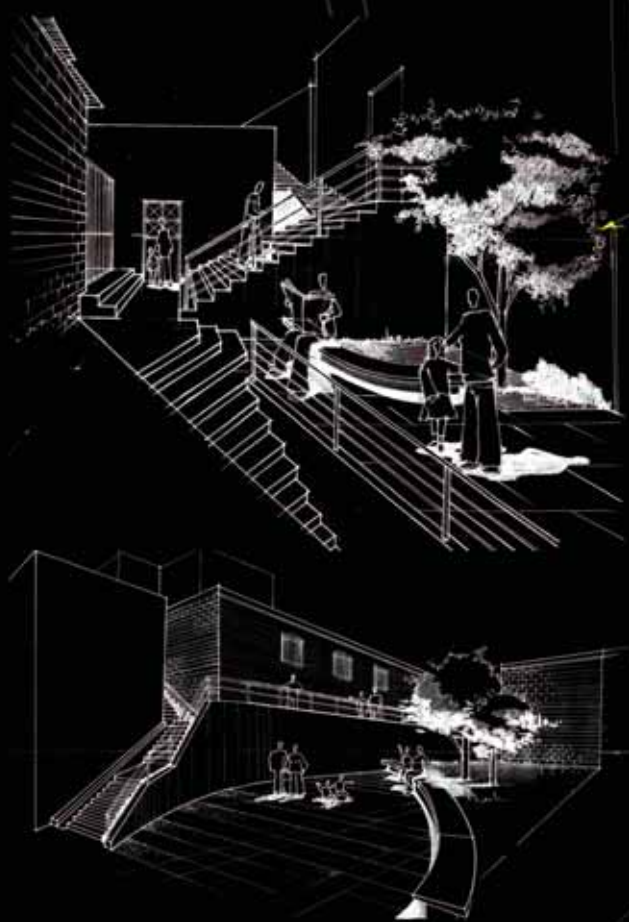
Between August 2001 and September 2002, the stairs "Las Torres", "La Loma", and "Sucre" were projected and constructed. The community, supported by technical advice, chooses those stairs among the more urgent problems. Each building site had an inspector representing the neighborhood.



2003

In July, a new phase started. The aim was to design detailed projects for each one of the roads, buildings and stairs proposed in the Urban Project. This was the only sector in La Vega where the same technical team continued working.

**SECTORCITO STAIR
PLAN** SCALE 1:75



All the small available spaces are used to generate public squares that facilitate the social contacts.

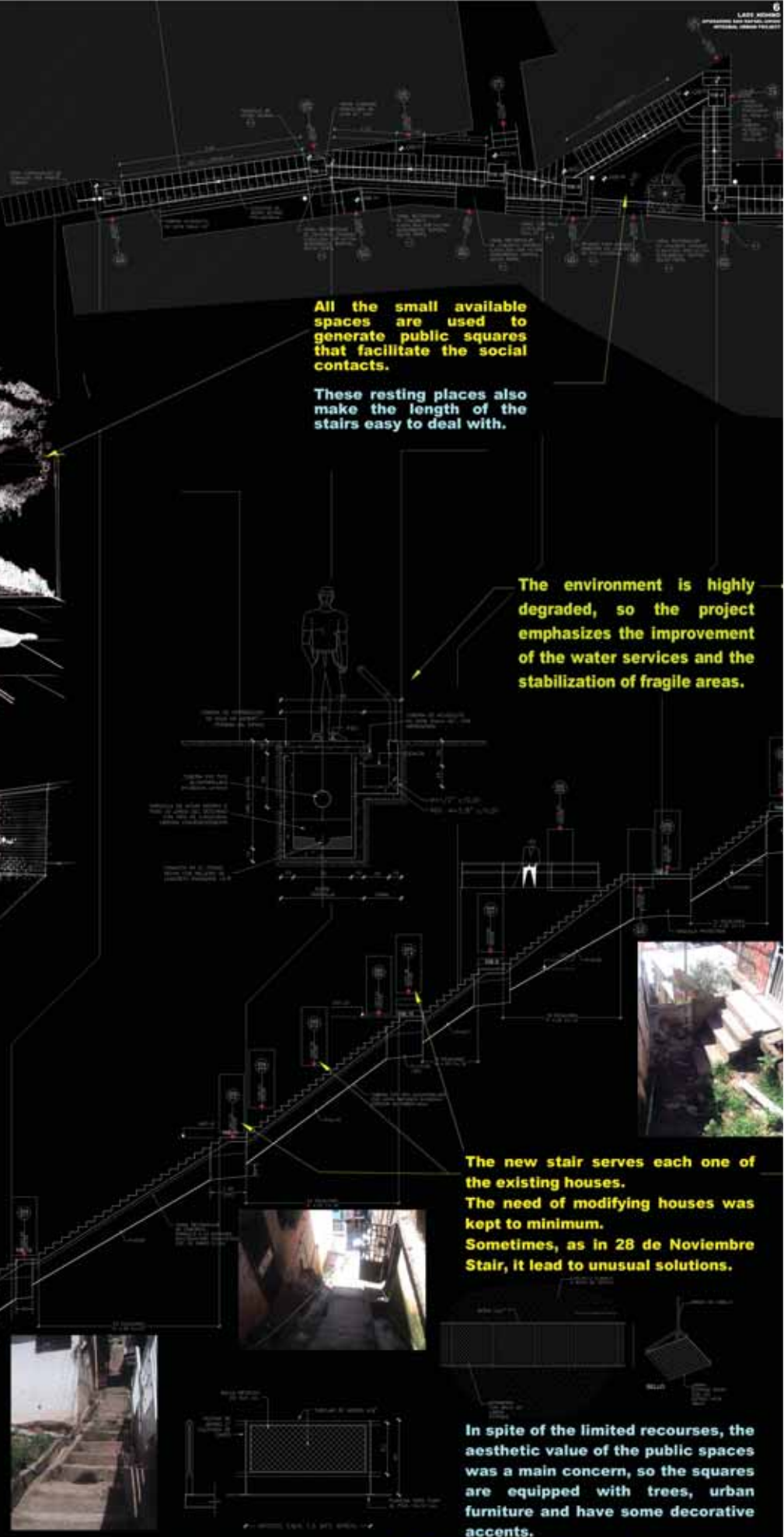
These resting places also make the length of the stairs easy to deal with.

The environment is highly degraded, so the project emphasizes the improvement of the water services and the stabilization of fragile areas.

**3 SECTORCITO STAIR
SECTION** SCALE 1:75



This is one among 30 that were designed in San Rafael-Unido. The stairs included in the Integral Project are in orange in the site plan. The criteria learned here are being applied in other settlements.



The new stair serves each one of the existing houses. The need of modifying houses was kept to minimum. Sometimes, as in 28 de Noviembre Stair, it lead to unusual solutions.

In spite of the limited recourse, the aesthetic value of the public spaces was a main concern, so the squares are equipped with trees, urban furniture and have some decorative accents.



Ethical standards and social equity Contextual response and aesthetic impact Ecological quality and energy saving



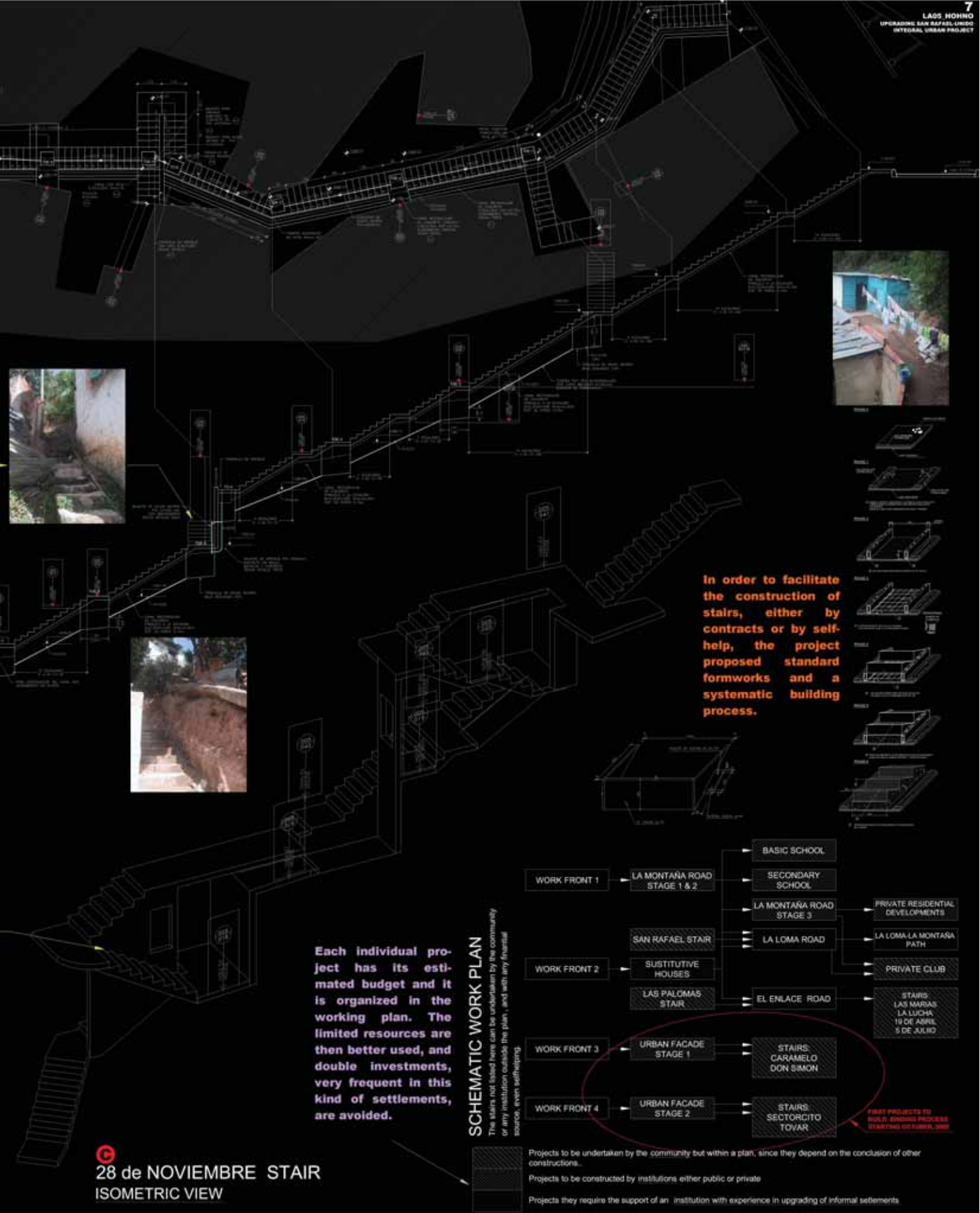
This time the site visit's focus was stair by stair and house by house, and the work was no longer with aerial photos but with detailed site surveys. The meetings were also different, talking about specific problems in smaller groups.

2004

As the individual projects were ready, each one was submitted to its direct users for its approval. The consent process was very strict and at least the 75% of the inhabitants must sign to consider a project accepted. Only one project, Los Muchachos path, was never agreed.



THE INTEGRAL PROJECT IS THE FINAL PHASE AND INCLUDES THE DETAILED



In order to facilitate the construction of stairs, either by contracts or by self-help, the project proposed standard formworks and a systematic building process.

Each individual project has its estimated budget and it is organized in the working plan. The limited resources are then better used, and double investments, very frequent in this kind of settlements, are avoided.

SCHEMATIC WORK PLAN
The stairs not listed here can be undertaken by the community or any institution outside the plan, and with any financial source, even selfhelping

28 de NOVIEMBRE STAIR
ISOMETRIC VIEW

- Projects to be undertaken by the community but within a plan, since they depend on the conclusion of other constructions.
- Projects to be constructed by institutions either public or private
- Projects they require the support of an institution with experience in upgrading of informal settlements

Quantum change and transferability Economic performance and compatibility Ethical standards and social equity



Pedro Duran,
Flor Sarmiento,
Arelis Angarita,
Luis Daniel Gómez,
Rafael Andrade
Rigoberto Navarro
without their help and support the project wouldn't have been possible.

2005

Dream on, work hard, and maybe someday the glittering lights on the hills will not be shaming slums but a new standard of living where social warmth and excellent urban quality make the city proud.