Mountain trail for land preservation and urban demarcation, Bogotá, Colombia

Project data

Type of project
Regional planning

Estimated start of construction
November 2008

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Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Latin America

The mountain trail will define the future border line between the city and the mountainous forest reserve surrounding Bogotá over a distance of 52km. The core strategy is to clearly mark and preserve the border line between the built space and the natural areas serving as an important recreational resort. Furthermore the new path for pedestrians, joggers and bicyclists will connect high class condominiums, middle class homes, working class neighborhoods and squatter settlements, and will thus contribute to an improved social mix and cohesion. The jury has not selected this project because the Bogota mountain trail is not simply an infrastructure project, but it is a clear sign of respect between humanity and nature. In this sense it will become a strong instrument to channel the further development of Bogotá and to improve its ecological quality. It is a simple and efficient solution to a common problem in rapidly-growing cities.

Project description by author

Bogotá, Colombia is surrounded by one of the most beautiful mountain ranges in the world. Before the arrival of Europeans, the local population found not only physical but spiritual sustenance among the mountains that now require urgent care. Today as a city of some 8 million inhabitants, Bogotá has turned its back on this fantastic heritage.

One of the tragic consequences of this centuries-old indifference towards this ecological treasure has been that no one really knows where the city ends and where the mountain borders are demarcated. The mountains have been subjected to chaotic urban growth, invasive non-native vegetation, agriculture, exotic reforestation and even mining. This degradation has brought us to a historical crossroad where we must take urgent action to preserve the mountains surrounding Bogotá for ourselves and for future generations. It is a situation of “now or never” considering the city’s population boom, combined with the world environmental crisis.

The aim of the project is to bring the mountains into contact with the people and the people into contact with their natural surroundings. The Bogotá Mountain Trail is not simply infrastructure; it is memory, feeling, and affection for our mountains and the names of their streams, their vegetation, their vistas, and their fauna. The Bogotá Mountain Trail will cover 497ha and will define a boundary between the city and the forest reserve of over 14,000ha in total. The trail will start at the northern tip of the city and wind over a distance of 52km until it reaches the southern tip of the city. It will pass behind high class condominiums, middle class homes, working class neighborhoods, squatter’s villages, and more diverse human settlements.

The trail infrastructure will be modest: drainage materials (stone, crushed brick), hanging bridges, wooden walkways, swings, open air classrooms, and vista points (lookouts). This modest infrastructure means that construction can be undertaken by nearly residents themselves with the assistance of the city government and other interested participants.

Ecological restoration will be geared primarily to seed gathering, nurseries for native species and collaboration with the Bogotá Botanical Gardens which will control invasive non-native vegetation. Our aim is not only to create infrastructure but to recover basic human relationships and values which revolve around trails. Trails have always meant adventure as well as a means of bringing people together. This is what our trail is meant to do. The neighbors who live along the trail will participate as guides, protectors, planters, and teachers who will tell the history of the mountains to visitors and residents and take it upon themselves to protect our common heritage.

Relevance to target issues by author

Quantum change and transferability
The project seeks to recover the ability of local government to manage the natural interface between a growing 8 million-inhabitant metropolis and an environmentally-protected area. The key to achieving sustainability and transferability of these changes lies in involving local communities, neighbors and sponsoring agencies in adopting environmentally-friendly uses of this natural frontier.

Ethical standards and social equity
The proposed corridor will serve as the physical backbone supporting environmentally-responsible public appropriation of these natural areas; enhancing knowledge of these natural and social ecosystems. Public appropriation of these spaces into the daily lives of neighborhoods and communities will promote peaceful coexistence between diverse social groups.

Ecological quality and energy conservation
The proposed natural corridor will offer a simple and effective solution for restoring and preserving natural ecosystems, bringing native plant and animal species into urban green areas, while promoting environmental education and responsible recreational uses of the protected areas.

Economic performance and compatibility
The project represents a strategic social and environmental investment, involving minimal infrastructure and reduced up-front costs for land acquisition. It will provide extended social and economic benefits resulting from environmentally-responsible management and harmonious coexistence of communities living in the area. Total investment costs for the proposed 52km is equivalent to the cost of only 4km of urban bus corridors. Economic benefits will be derived from responsible watershed and waste management and from the positive effects of this new frontier in controlling chaotic and socially-vulnerable informal (squatter) settlements along this fragile area.

Contextual and aesthetic impact
The project will act as a physical border facilitating the social and institutional preservation of the natural protected area. The experience of other similar urban development projects in Bogotá predicts that the flourishing of thematic recreational areas, ecological art preservation of the natural and architectural heritage, and the upgrading and beautification of participating neighborhoods will improve the quality of life of residents and contribute to a process of harmonization of urban life and the protection of natural areas.