

Ciclopaseo in Quito: Cycling Citizenship in the City

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Ciclopaseo is a 30-km route opened on Sundays every two weeks only for cycling, walking, or any other non-motorized means of transport. This route crosses the main streets of Quito with an average of 40,000 participants each time. A group of young urban cyclists called the Biciacción Foundation promoted this project, which was also supported by the municipality. *Ciclopaseo* not only encourages the use of bikes as an alternative mean of transport but also encourages the recovery of public spaces for people. After more than four years, *Ciclopaseo* has created an alternative form of transportation in the city. Since the beginning of the project, Quito has changed greatly: *Ciclopaseo* not only promotes an ecological consciousness, but also has created a sense of citizenship, identity, and sustainable urban mobility. *Ciclopaseo* represents the possibility of re-understanding our rights to urban spaces, and of considering, as citizens, our obligations to the places where we live.

Some Antecedents

The analyses of urban spaces have been the focus of much social research. Beyond other possible analytical approaches to urban spaces – such as economic growth or architectural aspects – a conceptual frame allows us to look at cities in a broader way: after all, the city is a most complex human construction, the most meaningful cultural production in human history¹. They have become ideal places for citizenship development. Hence, the social construction of our cities has become a necessary element in discussing their sustainability.

Quito has a population of two million people and approximately 300,000 cars circulating around every day. According to *Corpaire*,² Quito has the highest percentage of car usage growth in Ecuador at some 5 to 8% annually. Recently, Quito has become a city for automobiles, resulting in a negative effect in how urban spaces are planned and understood. The city seems to be a place where the principal actor is the machine, not the human being. That is to say, the rights of citizens have turned into the rights of cars.

Although the automobile users are in the minority,³ the city has



Fig. 1: People in the streets during *Ciclopaseo*.

been established and is still being constructed according to the dominance of car culture. A kind of hierarchical system seems to have been installed in the streets and the everyday life. Cars have become the symbol of modernity that determines the design of urban spaces. As in other Latin American cities, the city planners of Quito have given priority to the highways, wide and long streets, and small sidewalks. As the Catalan investigator Jordi Borja says, the public space is a performative place where society is made visible. Hence, the city that privileges public spaces before the private ones is a city that privileges the quality of life of its inhabitant. The problem of our current urban places is that they are non-places, as Augé emphasized: places with no identity, no history, and no interaction⁴.

Ciclopaseo: A Many Ways Street

Since 2003, the *Ciclopaseo* in Quito has become the most important sport and recreation activity in the city. Though the municipality has supported this project from the beginning, it was initiated by several civil and social groups such as the Biciacción Foundation, a non-profit organization created in 2002 to promote bicycles as an alternative means of transportation in the city. The Biciacción began as a group of cyclist friends who based their proposals on obtaining respect for other means of transportation. Some of them came from an important environmental organization in Ecuador called Acción

¹ Jordi Borja, *La Ciudad Conquistada* (Madrid: Ed. Alianza Ensayo 2003), p. 26.

² *Corpaire* is a municipal institution that works in the improving of the air in Quito. For more information: www.corpaire.org

³ In Quito only 20% of the people use automobiles, the remaining 80% are pedestrians and public transport users.

⁴ Marc Augé, *Non-lieux, Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil 1992).