



50 Years of Bogota's *Ciclovía*

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Introduction

Every Sunday morning Bogota experiences a deep urban transformation: 127 kilometers of the main arterial roads of the city are shifted from car's exclusive use to the use of cyclists, pedestrians, and runners in the Sunday's *Ciclovía*. This is an event combines sports, recreation, celebrations, and economic activity, taking place every week in the capital of Colombia for the past 50 years, creating a thriving biking culture. The event has been a consequence of the complementary efforts from the community and the administration.

On the 16th of December 1974, a section of Bogota's main streets was closed to traffic for the first time in an event called the pedal revolution (Figure 1). This was a consequence of the work of activist groups that promoted the use of the bicycle, both as a mode of mobility and a sport activity. The success of the event led the local administration to have an official municipal decree that declares the activity a permanent phenomenon for every Sunday from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

FIGURE 1 | **The Pedal Revolution**



Source: Fernando Caro Archive.

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This conference proceedings reflect the presentations and discussions of participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the WRI Colombia and other participating organizations.

Open street initiatives temporarily close streets to traffic with the purpose of creating public spaces for the enjoyment of citizens (Ocupa Tu Calle 2019). Even though the concept was not born in Bogota, the city has become an inspiration to scale it and implement it in many cities around the world, in what has become a global free street movement. Different cities have applied the concept adapted to their capacities, cultures, and needs. Multiple academics have studied the different mechanisms that have helped the concept to be shared and expanded around the world (Hidalgo 2014; Montero 2021).

Ciclovía has been constantly evolving during these 50 years, from a fully social event promoted by activist groups to a core cultural element of the city. This evolution included key moments, such as the expansion in the 1990s, the implementation of other sport activities like aerobics classes and open-air concerts, cycling schools, and the formal recognition as a cultural heritage of the city. The *Ciclovía* initiative had a fundamental role in the structuring of a cycling culture in Bogota, including the growth of the bicycle use as a mode of transport, the creation of activist groups and a booming economic activity around the use of the bicycle.

As part of the celebration of the first 50 years of *Ciclovía*, Universidad de Los Andes, with the support of multiple local and international partners, including WRI Colombia, organized a conference to discuss the present and future of the *Ciclovía* movement (Figure 2). The event took place at the Campus of Universidad de Los Andes on the 12th and 13th of December 2024. The following conference proceedings summarize the highlights of the panel on ‘International Experiences’, complemented with insights from other panels, and secondary sources.

FIGURE 2 | Academic Forum 50 Years of *Ciclovía*



Source: Universidad de los Andes.

Ciclovía’s international expansion

During the session on International Experiences, open streets advocates shared their efforts to expand these initiatives in cities across Peru, the United States, and South Africa. Panelists discussed their sources of inspiration, the process of adapting programs to local contexts, key factors for the success of open streets initiatives, and the role of governments and funding models. The following section highlights the experience of Los Angeles, Lima, and Cape Town, drawing on both the panelists’ presentations (Appendix A) and supplementary sources due to time constraints.

Los Angeles: CicLAvia

In the late 2000s, grassroots activists in Los Angeles sought ways to address the city's lack of public spaces and promote public health in a region dominated by car culture. In 2008, bicycle activists from Los Angeles visited Bogota, where they had the opportunity to experience *Ciclovía* and met with Jaime Ortiz, co-founder of *Ciclovía*. They returned to Los Angeles inspired by the *Ciclovía* experience. With a small group of other like-minded individuals, they created an ad hoc working group dedicated to bringing the concept to Los Angeles.

Unbeknownst to that group, Aaron Paley, President of Community Arts Resources (CARs), a community events and urban planning organization, was working on a similar concept to activate public spaces in Los Angeles. This led him to know the concept of *Ciclovía*, and propose to Mayor Villaraigosa to “close Wilshire Boulevard on Sundays and other contiguous boulevards to create a *Ciclovía* modeled on the highly successful example of Bogota, Colombia.” This call got the attention of biking activists, thus the two groups joined forces to further the same goal.

After months of organizing and planning, this new coalition of local organizations, volunteers, and community members, brought the idea to the mayor's office in Los Angeles. After several meetings with the mayor, getting the fire and police local departments on board, and dedicating a year to preparation, the first open streets event took place on October 10, 2010 (Figure 3). Approximately 100,000 people participated, traveling along a 7.5-mile route through downtown Los Angeles (CicLAvia 2021). The event was a huge and unexpected success, landing on the cover of the Los Angeles Times the following day, and many residents started to ask how to get CicLAvia in their neighborhoods (Rubin 2010).

FIGURE 3 | CicLAvia in 2010



Source: CicLAvia 2010 - Gary Leonard.

CicLAvia has been warmly embraced by Angelenos, growing through grassroots, bottom-up approach that allows residents to rediscover their city and reimagine it without cars. Since its inception, CicLAvia has welcomed approximately 1.8 million participants to explore 331 miles of open streets across Los Angeles (CicLAvia n.d.).

The organization prioritizes hosting events in areas with underserved demographics, high population density, favorable geography, cultural diversity, economic activity, and public transit accessibility. Beyond its open-streets events, CicLAvia has also created guides to help people explore and rediscover local gems in the city on foot.

CicLAvia collaborates closely with communities, local businesses, local artists, and government agencies to plan its events. They rely heavily on community support and available funding to make the events happen. At the beginning, the organization hosted about four events annually, though in recent years, this number has grown to eight. Funding comes primarily from sponsors, donations, and merchandise sales, with L.A. Metro being one of the biggest funders. Many residents also volunteer to assist on event days, further strengthening the community-driven spirit of CicLAvia. In addition to CicLAvia, Metro funding has enabled open streets events with different branding to happen on a monthly basis throughout Los Angeles County. This spread of economic support has transformed the region into the most active and successful metropolis for open streets in the United States and Canada.

Lima: Cliclodia

Jose Gutierrez, director of Edubici, shared insights into Lima's sustained efforts to promote non-motorized transportation in Peru. A longtime participant in Bogota's *Ciclovia*, Gutierrez brought his experience and love for open streets to Peru after relocating. There, he connected with the Municipality of Lima and eventually took on the role of coordinator for the city's *Ciclovia Recreativa*.

FIGURE 4 | *Ciclodia in Lima*



Source: J. Ashley Nixon.

Since the late 1980s, the city of Lima has been implementing policies and projects to promote the use of sustainable modes of transportation. In 1990, the Metropolitan Project for Non-Motorized Transportation (*Proyecto Especial Metropolitano Transporte No Motorizado*), was created to lead, coordinate, and monitor non-motorized transportation in the city. Throughout the 1990s, Lima built its first network of bike lanes around the city financed by the World Bank. In the 2000s, Lima developed its *Bicycle Lane Master Plan*, with funds from the World Bank and Global Environmental Fund (GEF), which marked the roadmap for the development of wider network of bike lanes of 292 kilometers along metropolitan avenues by 2025. Within the implementation of the project, the PEMTN redesigned its role to promote the use of bicycles through new strategies and development recreational activities. One of the key activities developed was *Ciclodía*, inspired by Bogota's *Ciclovía* (World Bank Group 2020).

On February 27, 2011, Lima closed six kilometers of the Arequipa Avenue to launch “*Ciclodía*, 6 kilometers of health and life” (Figure 4), a weekly event to promote more sustainable modes of transportation and new public spaces for people to exercise (*Publimetro* 2014). A survey conducted by *Lima Como Vamos*, in April 2011, found that 92 percent of users were satisfied with *Ciclodía*, with 43 percent of participants attending four or more events of *Ciclodía* (*Lima Como Vamos* 2011). In the survey, people highlighted how *Ciclodía* provides a space to foster interactions with their neighbors and provided a safe space to cycle. From 2011 to 2016, the number of participants increased from 15,000 to 24,000 (Nixon 2016). The city celebrated the first anniversaries with larger events that convoked cyclists and roller skaters.

While *Ciclodía* hasn't expanded permanently to new streets, it continues to bring people together every week in the center of Lima, boosting higher revenues for local businesses. Additionally, Lima has continued to expand its network of bike lanes to 323.43 kilometers across 34 districts in the metropolitan area (*Plataforma Nacional de Datos Abiertos* 2025).

Cape Town: Open Streets Cape Town

Inspired by her childhood in Bogota and a casual conversation with a friend in Cape Town, Marcela Guerrero Casas, cofounder of Local South and Open Streets Cape Town, began her journey as an open streets advocate in 2012. At the time, Cape Town was experiencing a wave of cycling activism, exemplified by events like the annual Moonlight Mass Bicycle Ride throughout the city. Guerrero Casas took the first steps by writing a letter to *The Cape Times*, sharing the story of *Ciclovía* and her vision for bringing the concept to Cape Town. She also submitted a concept note to the Secretary of Mobility in the Cape Town Mayor's Office.

FIGURE 5 | Open Streets Cape Town



Source: Rich Conyngham.

The Open Streets concept was first introduced to South Africa in 2003 when the Cape Town local government wanted to implement a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and visited Bogota, where they learned about *Ciclovía*. They piloted the idea of a car-free festival, but the initiative was not successful (BYCS N.D.).

More importantly, Guerrero Casa collaborated with local organizations, activists, and the broader community to introduce the open streets concept, building grassroots support while advocating to the local government. With the support of the Cape Town Partnership and other civic organizations, Cape Town hosted its first open streets day on May 25, 2013. The event transformed an 800-meter stretch of street into a car-free space, attracting 5,000 participants (Guerrero and Brent 2016). It provided residents with a unique opportunity to reconnect and interact with their neighbors, an experience especially meaningful in a city shaped by segregation and urban sprawl (Figure 5).

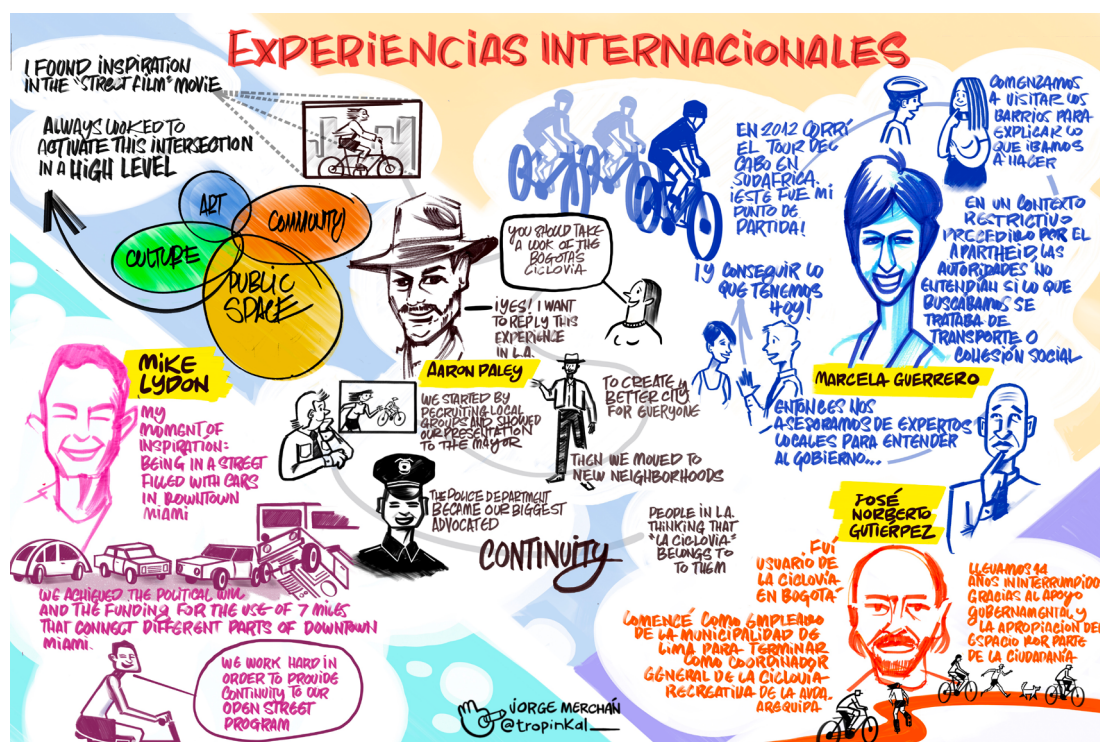
Formally established in 2013, Open Streets Cape Town continued to advocate for and organize several Open Streets days across the city each year, contingent on capacity and resources (*Periodismo Publico* 2020). These events brought communities together in various neighborhoods and relied heavily on donations, grants, and volunteer efforts. Notably, one significant grant came from international cooperation. However, a recurring challenge was navigating costly local permits, which often posed barriers to the development of a long-term program.

Although Open Streets Cape Town as an organization closed, the spirit of Open Streets lives on. Local organizations and activists have continued to champion similar initiatives within communities (Guerrero and Mgedle 2024). More recently, the Young Urbanists, a local NGO, and the City of Cape Town have collaborated on a pilot program to close certain streets every Sunday during the summer, ensuring the legacy of Open Streets continues to foster connection and reimagine public spaces in the city (Kiewit 2024).

Key aspects about open streets

During the session, panelists highlighted the key benefits and factors that have enabled the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of open streets initiatives. Many of these lessons can be observed in Bogota's experience with *Ciclovía*.

FIGURE 6 | Graphic summary of the panel



Source: Jorge Merchan, Tropicinal.

Regional networks inspire activists and expand ideas to other cities

Regional networks provide a valuable platform for activists, policymakers, and other stakeholders to connect and exchange knowledge. One such example is the *Red de Ciclovías de las Americas*, a non-profit organization founded in 2005 to unite leaders and advocates of open streets initiatives across the Americas to promote the sharing of experiences and ideas (Ciclovías Recreativas de las Americas N.D.). During the event, Paley emphasized how instrumental these networks were in the early days of CicLAvia's development in Los Angeles. Similarly, Guerrero Casas highlighted she often engaged with CicLAvia and members of the *Red de Ciclovías de las Americas* to offer a reference (besides Bogota), when introducing the concept to Cape Town. She also noted that she helped convene the first Open Streets for African Cities exchange, which resulted in a of a less formal, yet active, network among African cities—often coordinated informally through WhatsApp, demonstrating how digital tools are supporting collaboration across regions.

Open Streets initiatives provide a platform to rethink the use of streets and public spaces for enjoyment purposes

The panelists agreed that the success of open streets initiatives lies in the sense of ownership that communities bring to each event. While bicycles are a central feature of Bogota's *Ciclovía*, other cities have focused their initiatives on celebrating cultural heritage and encouraging residents to explore and discover unique aspects of their city. Guerrero Casas emphasized how Open Streets Cape Town provided specific spaces for local communities to imagine and brainstorm what they would do in a world with car-free streets. Another example is CicLAvia, which developed walking guides for people to rediscover various neighborhoods in the city. The Open Street movement helps to open discussion about the best way to use public space, the construction of bike lanes, pedestrianization, lane reduction and other transformations of the public spaces.

Open Streets initiatives have been used as a public policy tool to promote sustainable modes of transport

A notable example mentioned during the panel was CicLAvia's partnership with Los Angeles Metro to promote the use of public transportation in the city. CicLAvia's events are strategically located near metro lines, and it encourages participants to leave their car at home and take public transportation to the events. This strategy can be contrasted with Lima's *Ciclodía*, where the initiative itself was part of a bigger strategy to promote their expanding network of bike lanes and promote sustainable modes of transportation.

Bogota has 608 kilometers of exclusive bike lanes, and more than 7 percent of all trips made in the city are made by bicycle, making it one of the global leaders of mobility by bicycle in the world (Alcaldia de Bogota 2023; Secretaria Distrital de Movilidad 2024). While its development has been a gradual process and further improvements are needed to enhance connectivity, *Ciclovía* has played a significant role in inspiring citizens and local organizations to advocate for their expansion. Additionally, many cyclists who now use the bike as a primary mode of transportation began exploring their journeys during *Ciclovía*, which allowed them to experience the city in a safe and car-free environment. This weekly tradition has not only encouraged cycling as a recreational activity, but it has also helped normalize it as a sustainable and practical means of transport in Bogota.

Open Street initiatives promote cultural integration and social cohesion

Open and car-free streets not only allow citizens to explore their city in a different way, connecting them to parts of the city that they don't explore or know. Guerrero Casas highlighted how Open Streets Cape Town has brought together people from different races and parts of the city and rethink how they can use the event to improve their neighborhoods, many of which were shaped around apartheid policies.

Open Streets initiatives promote economic development in the city

Open streets events provide significant economic benefits and visibility for local businesses and street vendors. CicLAvia in Los Angeles, in partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles, estimated a sales increase of up to 57 percent for local businesses along CicLAvia routes, further highlighting the economic value of open streets initiatives (DeShazo et al. 2013).

Ricardo Montezuma, professor at *Universidad Nacional de Colombia*, who participated in the Economías de la *Ciclovía* panel, shared indicators related to the concentration of jobs along *Ciclovía*. On average, *Ciclovía* creates approximately 15.75 jobs per kilometer, depending on the level of traffic, with the least busy tracks still generating 1.57 jobs per kilometer. Many of these jobs come from informal businesses, such as fruit and refreshment vendors and on-the-spot mechanics, contributing to additional income for informal workers in the city. Additionally, the local government creates jobs by employing guardians and operations professionals to ensure *Ciclovía* runs smoothly.

Governments, activists, and citizens have a key role in promoting and maintaining open streets initiatives

In Los Angeles and Cape Town, the continuity of open streets initiatives has largely depended on the leadership and persistence of local organizations such as CicLAvia and Open Streets Cape Town. Mike Lydon, member of Street Plans and founder of the Open Streets Project, further highlighted the importance of an entity or organization advocating for open streets initiatives, as well as funding strategies to ensure its long-term sustainability. Lydon shared how the changes in the city's administration disrupted the open streets initiatives in Miami.

The success of Bogota's *Ciclovía* can be partially explained by the synergies and check and balances roles of the local government, activists, and citizens. The City of Bogota's ability to consistently fund and operate *Ciclovía* has allowed it to take place on a weekly basis for the past 50 years, fostering a sense of routine and community expectation every Sunday.

At the same time, the level of community adoption and highly organized community creates constant pressure for local politicians to guarantee the financial and human resources needed for the operation of the initiative. This level of institutional support sets it apart from many other cities, where local organizations and activists must seek diverse funding sources to organize events, leading events to take place only a few times a year.

In Bogota, local activists and community organizations play a vital role alongside government support in sustaining *Ciclovía* (Figure 7). They closely monitor its operation, advocate for improvements, and hold authorities accountable. These efforts help preserve the program's integrity and embed it as a core part of the city's cultural fabric.

FIGURE 7 | Bogota on a Sunday morning



Source: WRI Colombia.

Conclusion

The international panel highlighted the impact that open streets initiatives have had in cities such as Los Angeles, Lima, and Cape Town, demonstrating how they create spaces for people to reimagine and reconnect with their cities. These initiatives were also recognized as powerful public policy tools to promote sustainable mobility and local economic activity. Panelists emphasized the critical role of civic organizations and community participation in ensuring ownership and long-term sustainability, as well as the importance of regional networks that inspire and support the implementation of open streets programs in more cities.

The conference highlighted how over the past 50 years, Bogota's *Ciclovía* has become a defining element of the city's identity and a living laboratory for innovation and a reference for the implementation of open streets and the activation of public spaces. Moving forward, however, Bogota must continue fostering open dialogue among experts, local authorities, activists, and citizens to shape the future of *Ciclovía*. The conference highlighted key areas for improvement, including accessibility and safety, especially children and women, the equitable expansion of routes across all areas of the city, and the integration with metropolitan area. As a global leader in sustainable mobility, Bogota has both the responsibility and the opportunity to further strengthening and refining these initiatives.

Appendix

APPENDIX A | Participants

TABLE A-1 | Participants on the International Experiences panel

NAME	ROLE	ORGANIZATION
Moderator: Sergio Montero	Director	Institute for Inclusive Economies & Sustainable Livelihoods, Universidad de Toronto
Jose Norberto Gutierrez	Director	Edubici
Marcela Guerrero Casas	Co-founder	Local South y Open Streets Cape Town
Mike Lydon	Founder	Open Streets Project
Aaron Paley	Co-founder	Community Arts Resources (CARS) and CicLAvia

Source: Universidad de los Andes.

APPENDIX B | Agenda

TABLE B-1 | Conference agenda

DAY 2: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13 TH , 2024	
Time	Panel
9:00 – 9:45 a.m.	Keynote: “Ciclovía 50: Connections between Africa and Latin America”
10:00 – 11:00 a.m.	Table 4: Ciclovía’s Economies
11:10 – 12:20 p.m.	Table 5: Urbanism and Public Policy
2:00 – 3:00 p.m.	Table 6: International Experiences
4:00 – 4:30 p.m.	Closing remarks

Note: This table highlights the panels that served as sources of information for this conference proceedings.

Source: Universidad de los Andes.

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