Proyecto Nómada/Social Integration and Ephemeral Architecture in Urban Public Space

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Abstract

We live in an urbanizing world, which not only brings prosperity, but also extreme poverty and the gap between the poor and rich is getting wider. Cities of developing countries are marked by social, spatial and economical segregation, which creates deep social and economic disparities leading to social isolation and income inequalities. Proyecto Nómada is based on the workshop developed at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, under the direction/supervision of Professor Alfonso Solano and it searches for an answer to the following question: "What can architects and designers do for the problematic of forced displacement in Colombia?" This project is a strategy that helps marginalized communities to integrate into the city through cultural and educational activities, ephemeral architecture and temporary occupation of (forgotten) urban spaces. Together with four cultural houses and different artistic collectives, the strategy was tested in the city of Bogotá in June 2011. The project has a great receiving from the community and helped in the visualization of different urban groups affected by vulnerability and displacement.

Keywords: Ephemeral arquitecture, social integration, public space, meeting points, interaction, cultural and educational activities.

20

Proyecto Nómada/Integración Social y Arquitectura Efímera en espacios públicos urbanos

Resumen

Vivimos en un mundo cada vez más urbanizado, lo cual no solo trae prosperidad, sino también pobreza extrema y la brecha entre ricos y pobres se hace cada vez más amplia. Las ciudades de los países en desarrollo están marcadas por segregación espacial, económica y social, lo cual crea disparidades sociales y económicas profundas que llevan al aislamiento social y a una desigualdad aguda de ingreso. El Proyecto Nómada se basa en el taller desarrollado en la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Bogotá, bajo la dirección del profesor Alfonso Solano, el cual tenía como pregunta principal: ¿Qué pueden hacer los arquitectos y diseñadores frente a la problemática del desplazamiento forzado en Colombia? Este proyecto es una estrategia que ayuda a comunidades marginadas a integrarse a la ciudad por medio de las actividades culturales y educativas, desarrolladas en arquitectura efímera al ocupar temporalmente lugares olvidados o descuidados de la ciudad. Este proyecto fue desarrollado con cuatro casas culturales y diferentes colectivos de artistas plásticos y la estrategia fue probada en Bogotá durante junio del 2011. El proyecto tuvo un gran recibimiento de la comunidad, en general, y ayudó a visibilizar diferentes grupos urbanos en condición de desplazamiento y vulnerabilidad.

Palabras clave: Arquitectura efímera, integración social, espacio público, puntos de encuentro, interacción, actividades culturales y educativas.

Construcción del módulo
Plazoleta del Chorro de Quevedo
Fuente: Raúl Marino

21

Flavia Barar

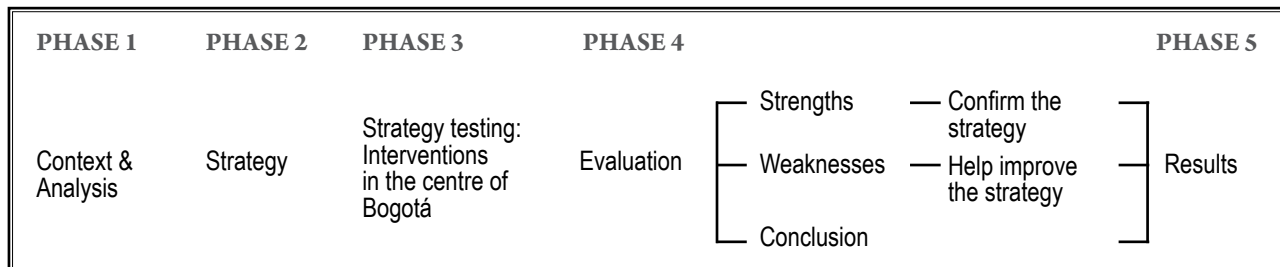## Introduction and Context

Figure 1. Methodology of the diploma thesis
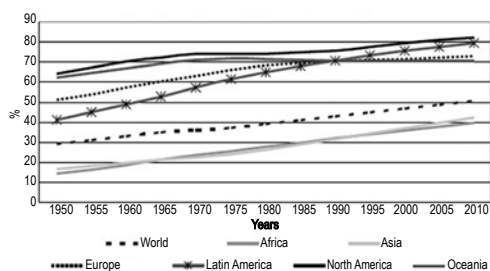Source: Flavia Barar

Figure 2. Population in urban areas
Source: Demographical transformation and inequalities in Latin American Population Association, ALAP

Over 4 decades ago, the Greek urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis foresaw the world's urban growth and described the "Ecumenopolis" or "the world city" as a consequence of urban and demographic growth, in which megalopolises would fuse to a single city.

Today the urban trend is clear, as the United Nations (UN) expects the world population growth to reach 10 billion people by the year 2050, 70% of which will be living in an urbanized area. This growth not only brings prosperity and development, but also extreme poverty and social segregation. One out of three people is expected to live in a slum by the year 2015.

Latin America witnessed a faster urbanization (ALAP) than most other regions, impulsed by economical growth in cities, causing a rural exodus of people searching for better opportunities and economical stability. However, the cities couldn't respond to the wave of migrations, causing an informal growth of the peripheries. The result, as can be seen today, is social spatial and economical segregation, informality and bipolarity (poverty and wealth).

A picture taken in Mexico City shows the barrio Jalalpa, a former invasion next to the city's new business district of Santa Fe, two opposite worlds separated by fences and surveillance device, which only interact in an employer-employee relationship (September, 2007).

Additionally, Colombia confronts severe problems of internal forced displacement due to the armed conflict, where millions of people are forced to flee from the countryside and settle in the cities' peripheral areas. According to the IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), between 3.6 and 5.2
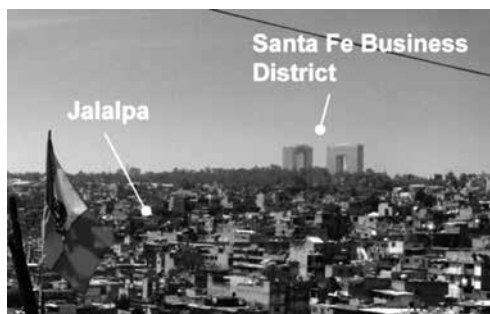

Figure 3. Mexico City, barrio Jalalpa and Santa Fe
Source: Flavia Barar

22

Figure 4. Altos de Cazucá, Soacha
Source: Raphael Dietz (photo)

Figure 5. Social gap in Bogotá
Source: Flavia Barar

million, people are affected by the armed conflict and are in a condition of displacement. This numbers constitutes 7.8-11.3% of the Colombian population.

The city of Bogotá is marked by social-spatial and economical segregation and is basically divided in two parts: The better developed, wealthy north and the poor, underdeveloped south. Seventy percent (70%) of the displaced persons are located in the southern part of Bogotá. According to socioeconomic level, this is the area that shows the lowest development in the Colombian capital, where living conditions are poor and lacking of basic service and infrastructure.

The *2009 Latin American Population Association, Demographic transformations and inequalities in Latin America* report indicates that the SRS (Socioeconomic-Residential-Segregation) is a process that obstructs the finances of poor neighborhoods. It creates the effect of a "neighborhood effect", which affects the habitants of poor areas in a negative way (lack of infrastructure, services, but also the stigma to reside in a poor neighborhood). This also hinders the integration and interaction between different socio-economical groups and is a mechanism that tends to reproduce poverty.

The IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre) brings up the concerning fact that 65.5% of the Colombian displaced population is under 25 years old, and 50% of them are underage. These people represent a sensitive and vulnerable part of the population, which has special needs of education and economical opportunities through formal income.
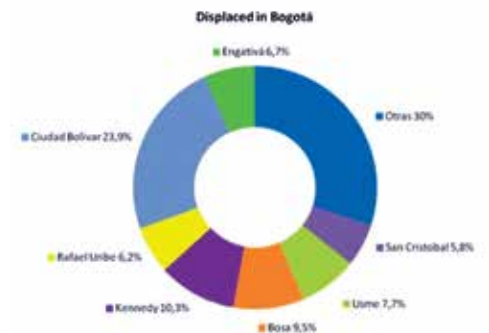

Figure 6. Percentage of displaced population
Source: Red de Solidaridad Social, Unidad Territorial de Bogotá (UTB) Cálculos: Secretaría de Hacienda del Distrito, SHD; Dirección de Estudios Económicos

Figure 7. Underage persons affected by forced displacement
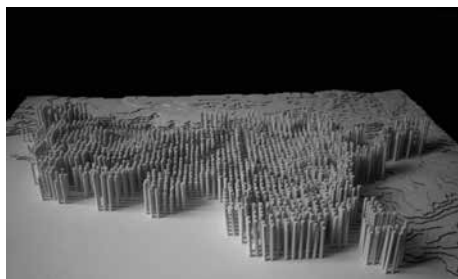Source: Flavia Barar

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Figure 8. Model of Bogotá: North and South, according to socioeconomic levels 1-6
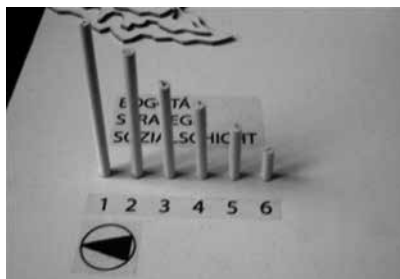Source: Flavia Barar

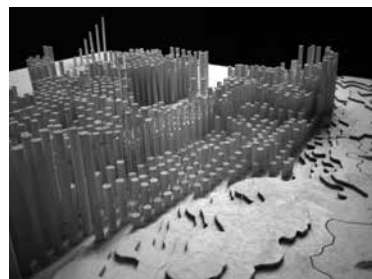**Figure 9.** Legend of socioeconomic level
Source: Flavia Barar

Figure 10. North of Bogotá, socioeconomic levels 5 and 6 represent the best developed area of the city
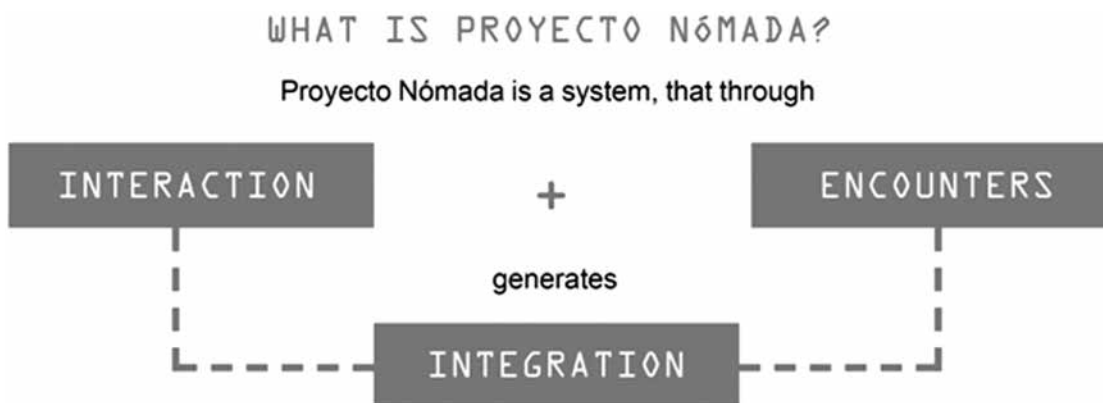Source: Flavia Barar

Proyecto Nómada

Figure 11. Scheme of the strategy
Source: Flavia Barar

People and communities that are affected or threatened by marginalization can be integrated in the city and given the opportunity to express their initiatives. In Bogotá, the project works as a system for social integration between displaced or marginalized communities in the periphery and the already emplaced communities in the city. This happens via meeting points, thus enabling cultural and educational activities between different social groups and stimulating the communication and interaction between people that would not meet each other under normal circumstances.

Proyecto Nómada should be a first step to break down the barriers set up by socioeconomic-residential segregation: the city is to be culturally connected; different cultural activities act like

catalysts, which enable the communication between different social groups.

How Does Proyecto Nómada Work?

- Call for interventions: Choosing a cultural theme and announcement of the project.

- Local phase: Nómada spreads in the city and is being processed in communities on a local scale.

- Selection: Exhibition of the local works and selection for the collective intervention.

- Intervention: Participants from different communities work together on the project. This phase takes place downtown, at the meeting points.

- Presentation: Public access to the works.

Figure 12. Areas to connect in Bogotá
Source: Flavia Barar

Figures 13 and 14. Graphical representation of the two phases of the project
Source: Flavia Barar

25

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Meeting Points

Figure 15. Lot A: Las Aguas, abandoned lot next to the future Spanish Cultural Centre. Lot B: Carrera 7 with Calle 19, abandoned for several years, construction works started 2011
Photo: Flavia Barar, Source: Paloma Sánchez. MAPS: COOGLE EARTH. Bogotá

The area selected for the placement of the meeting points is located in the city's downtown, between the Calle 26, the historical center La Candelaria and the Carrera 30. This area was chosen because it is easily accessible for all inhabitants, considering the facility of public transportation through TransMilenio and the Carrera 30 as one of the major roads. The city's downtown can also be considered as a "neutral zone", neither north nor south, a place where different communities can meet as equal and benefit from the proximity to different cultural institutions. The meeting points will be placed (if possible) in abandoned lots, as shown in example A and B, which can be seen as "Non-Spaces", as anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) defines them:

> In contrast to traditional places, where orientation and belonging are based on sedentary and localized inhabitation, non-places are designed to be experienced by transitory and mobile shoppers, commuters, corporate nomads, tourists, itinerants, migrants, and virtual workers. Complaints about non-place commonly identify a loss of personal identity, a decline in meaningful relations amongst the users of spaces, and the forgetting of history. One design response to these deficits is to restore identity, relations and memory: to make non-places more homely.

In this way, Proyecto Nómada can contribute to the revitalization of forgotten urban space.
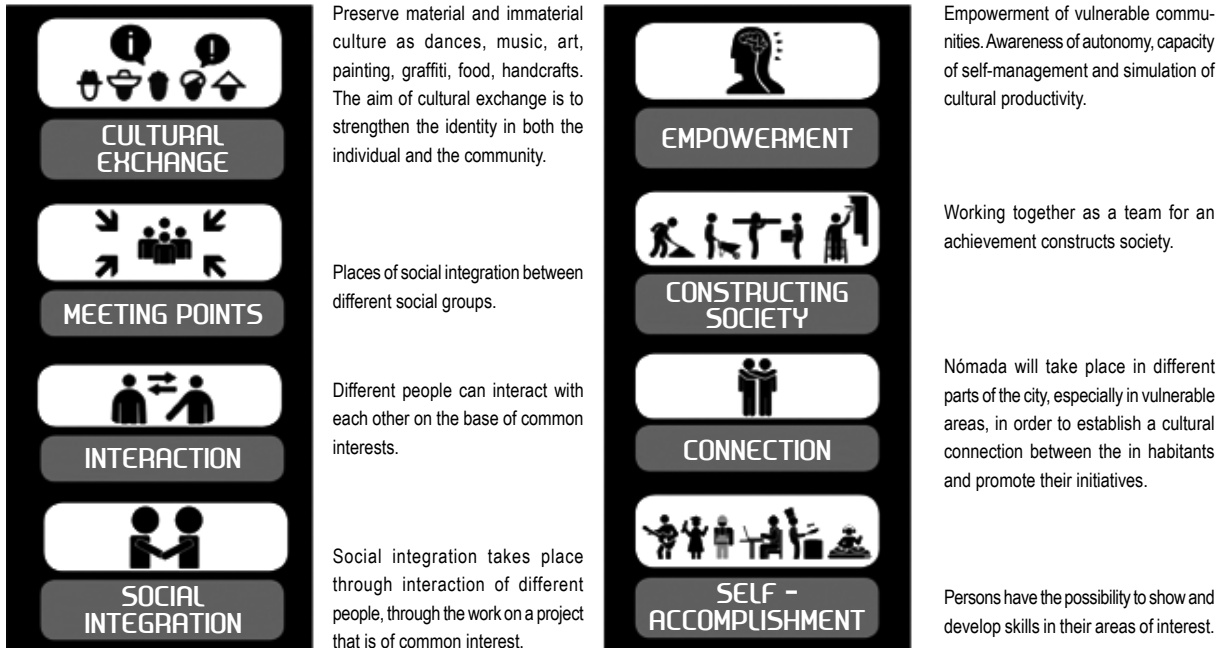
Goals

CULTURAL EXCHANGE — Preserve material and immaterial culture as dances, music, art, painting, graffiti, food, handcrafts. The aim of cultural exchange is to strengthen the identity in both the individual and the community.

MEETING POINTS — Places of social integration between different social groups.

INTERACTION — Different people can interact with each other on the base of common interests.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION — Social integration takes place through interaction of different people, through the work on a project that is of common interest.

EMPOWERMENT — Empowerment of vulnerable communities. Awareness of autonomy, capacity of self-management and simulation of cultural productivity.

CONSTRUCTING SOCIETY — Working together as a team for an achievement constructs society.

CONNECTION — Nómada will take place in different parts of the city, especially in vulnerable areas, in order to establish a cultural connection between the in habitants and promote their initiatives.

SELF-ACCOMPLISHMENT — Persons have the possibility to show and develop skills in their areas of interest.

Figure 16. Goals of the project
Source: Flavia Barar

Testing

Proyecto Nómada was tested through a series of artistic interventions in the public urban space of Bogotá. The interventions were realized in collaboration with the collective versus and received full support from four local cultural houses, known as "La REDada". Proyecto Versus/Nómada launched in March 2011 and successfully ended in July with a series of artistic interventions on the streets of the city.

The website of collective versus was used to summon interested artists. As the target was to gather different peoplefrom all over Bogotá, every time a person subscribed, the locality would light up on the city map (see figures 19 and 20).
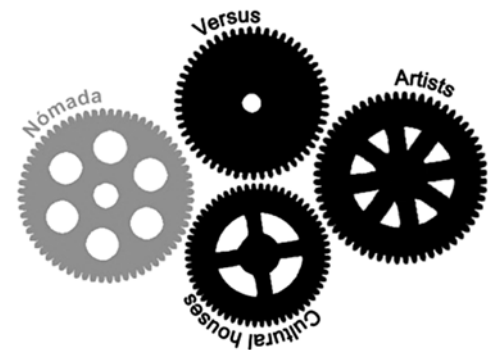

Figure 17. Mechanism Nómada-Versus
Source: Flavia Barar

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Figure 18. La REDada
Source: Flavia Barar

Figures 19 and 20. Flyer and map for Proyecto Versus/Nómada
Source: Arthur Gourdin

28

9

Figure 21. Map of the actors
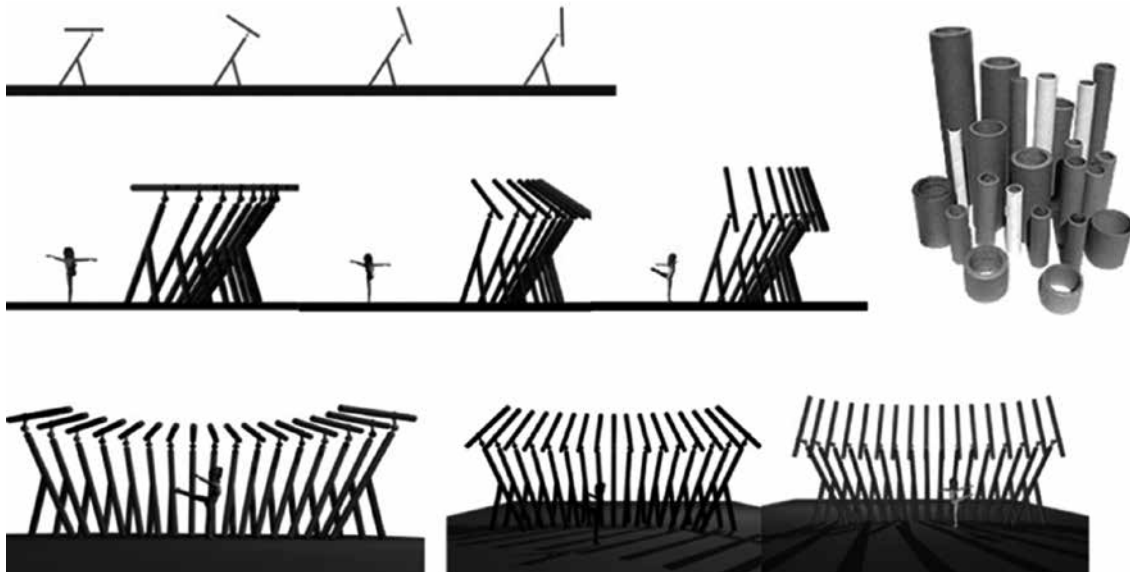Sou: Raúl Marino

Módulo Nómada

Figure 22. Concept
Source: Flavia Barar

The idea was to design a flexible module, easy to transport and assemble, and that could serve for different functions: a workshop for urban agriculture, a stage for a dance performance, and a screen for video projections. Due to the low budget of the project, the module is mostly built out of recycled materials such as cardboard tubes, water pipes and accessories (see figures 23 and 24).

29
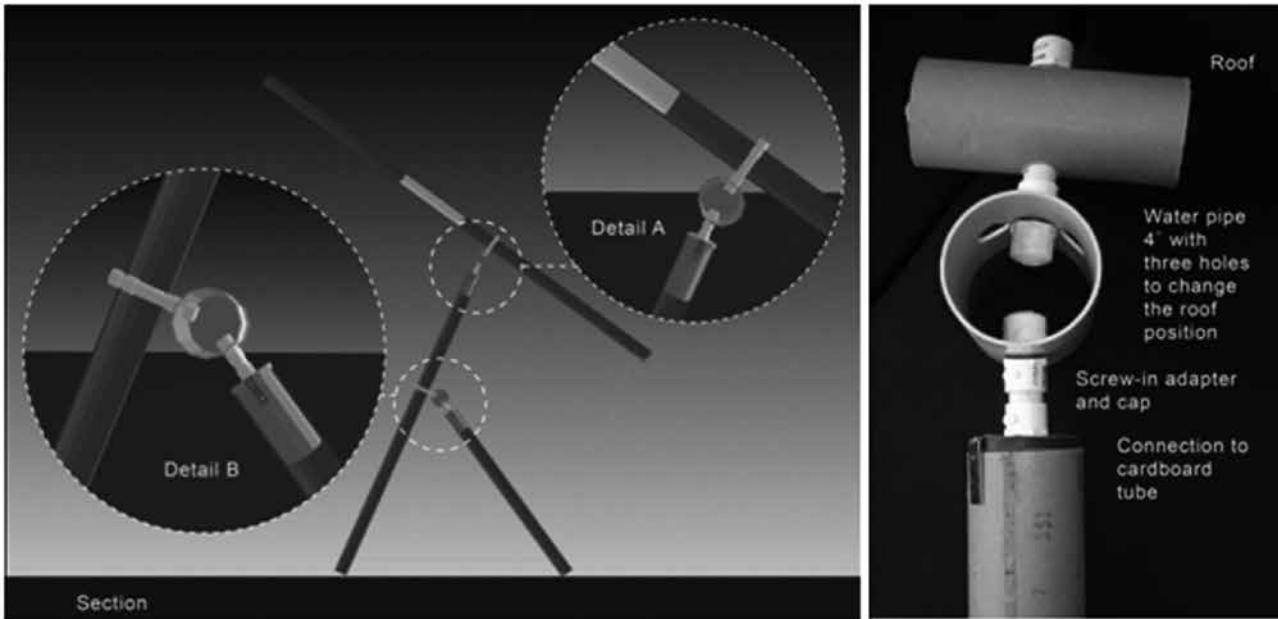
Flavia Barar

Figures 23 and 24. Section and construction detail of the module designed by Flavia Barar
Source: Flavia Barar

Figure 25. Panoramic picture of the built module in the Plazoleta del Chorro de Quevedo designed by Flavia Barar
Source: Flavia Barar

Figure 26. Furniture made of cardboard tubes. Furniture design: Raúl Marino.
Workshop of Urban Agriculture for Children. Plazoleta Chorro de Quevedo. Intervention in Plazoleta del Rosario with Video Projections
Source: Register Team, Project Versus/Nómada

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Conclusion

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish
and you feed him for a lifetime.
Chinese Proverb

Figure 27. Scheme of the strategy
Source: Flavia Barar

Project Nómada reached its goals of social integration through interaction and temporary occupation of urban space. A large number of committed artists, of different ages and provenience participated in the project, and the module is only one of many different interventions that were realized in Bogotá's downtown last year. The successful events organized together with the cultural houses proved the strategy. For upcoming events, the goal is to establish a professional team (e.g. psychologists, anthropologists, engineers, city officials) to imply and support the project.

Proyecto Nómada is a cyclic process that aims to adapt to different situations, cities and countries, based on a "trial and error" procedure. The following scheme (figure 28) explains the steps to be taken:
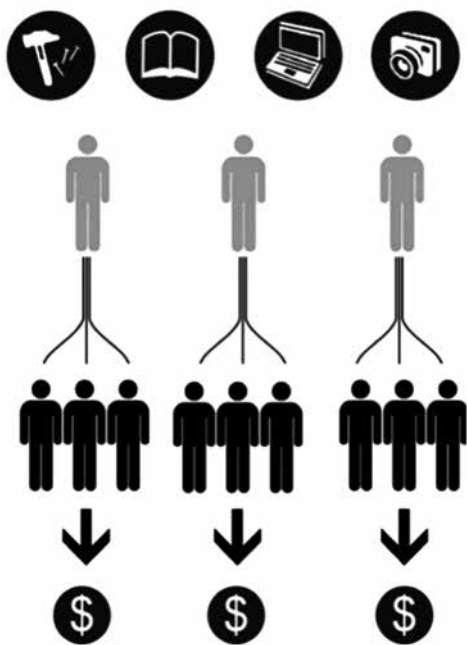
Proyecto Nómada can contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable communities such as displaced persons, and help them reach economical stability. Many of these persons receive financial support from different organizations. The goal of the project is to encourage these persons to obtain their financial independence. For future interventions, artists that participate in the project can organize special workshops at their locality to train persons in different areas and improve their skills. Later on, a system of microcredit can be implemented to help these persons start their own business.

Additional Acknowledgements

Figure 28. Model of community empowerment
Source: Flavia Barar

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