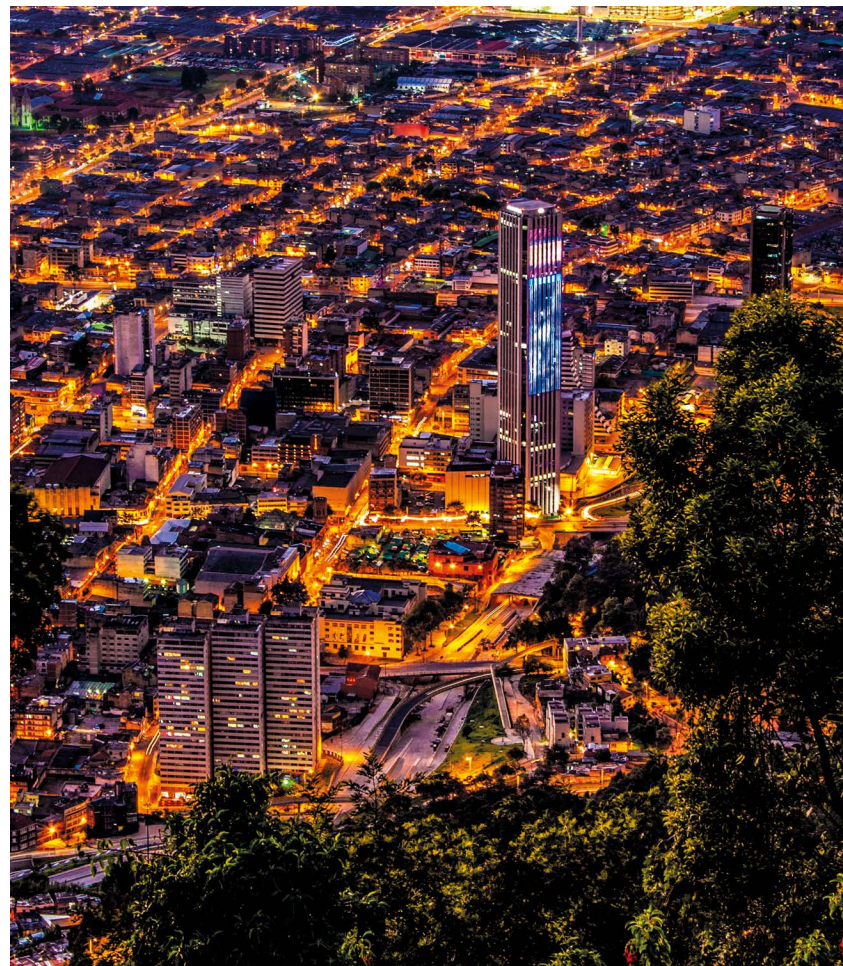


The city for everybody:

a possible dream



In the cities of the future, the paths of the past, planning, and dreams cross. That is, the understanding of the *Program 2084 Movement of Futures Imagined from the South* that connects academic and cultural institutions from Latin America, the United States, and Europe in search of possible, diverse, and inclusive futures for the urban centers of the Global South. This is an initiative of the Latin American Observatory of The New School, in which Universidad del Rosario participates.

By: Juliana María Vergara Agámez
Photos: Ximena Serrano, Milagro Castro

The future is a permanent obsession for human beings. We look for answers to our aims and fears; we plan and build; we think about transcending or leaving long-term legacies. That concern about what is to come has provided us with great artistic works. The history of cinema and literature keeps a long record of titles such as *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Blade Runner*, or *1984*, that have served as inspiration or warning.

It does not matter what the landmark is; a myriad of images go through our minds that draw us to those imagined futures.

The six-monthly project of the students from the course “City and Development of Humanity of the Urban Management and Development Program” (GDU, Spanish acronym) at Universidad del Rosario is taking them one step further on this path. They are committed to imagining and shaping up possible city futures based on approaches drawn from various disciplines, such as archeology, arts, and urban planning. **Diego Silva**, a professor in charge of this subject in the Faculty of International, Political, and Urban Studies, explains that the Greeks and Romans thought about the future based on the ruins they found; that was how the Roman city was created, the first

one in history that had a catalog of what a city must have and what a city must be, at least from the Western point of view.

It may turn out to be easier than what it seems, according to Silva’s perspective: “Just like today a city must have a building, a bridge, or an airport designed by well-known architects such as Norman Foster or Santiago Calatrava, to name just two of them, in ancient times, it had to host a theater, some baths, or a stadium, to be deemed a city.” With those elements, the students are building the future of the urban equipment over time and geography. At the end of the course, they will be able to talk about the future, a future that will inevitably be impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, because it has put us away from social spaces and forced us to find shelter in private settings.

Silva illustrates the situation by explaining that, given its international purpose, the *2084 Program/Movement of Imagined Futures from the South*, which is the name of the project that serves as a framework for these and other activities, has turned to the Internet as a meeting

point. “Even so, without the pandemic, it would be just the same. A starting point for each person, as the managers of their futures, to imagine from anywhere.” He adds that although for today’s citizens, this is a new situation, epidemics and pandemics have been a constant factor in the history of humanity. “The cities that we know today are the result of situations like this one,” he warns. As a close case, in many places in America, including Colombia, the colonial cities were founded based on the restrictions and fear to the mosquito transmitting malaria (also known as paludism) and other tropical diseases, under the decrees of the Spanish king Philip II, who in the 16th century warned about looking for places that were not “too low because they are usually sick.”

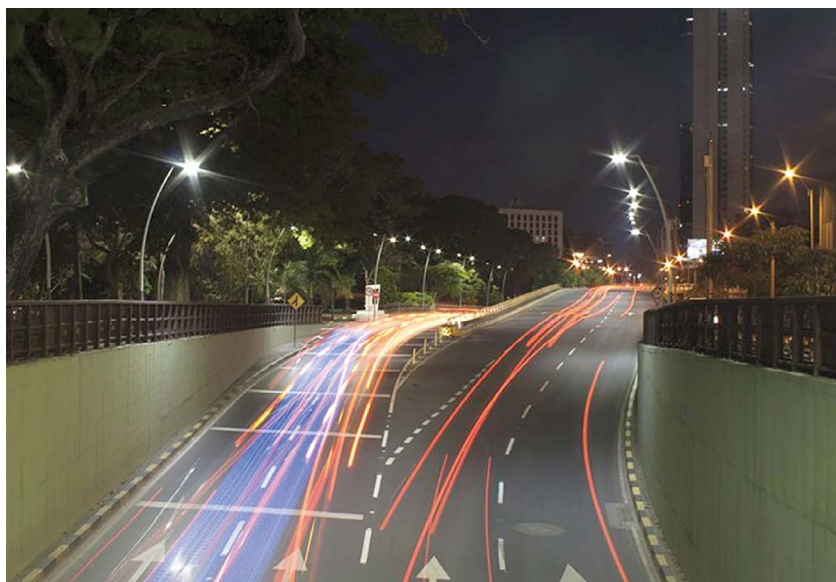
The program centers upon urban facts and the daily life in cities, starting from educational and cultural centers and then gradually opening spaces for collective expression, empowering the voices of minorities and vulnerable as well as marginalized sectors. It is about imagining inclusive futures—always emphasizing the plural expression—and creating channels for collective communication that allow people to express, share, and reflect on their hopes, expectations, and fears (...).

Besides being supported by virtuality, the work structure of all the participants enables each institution to foster and perform activities that contribute to the achievement of objectives. The results obtained are socialized to move ahead along the key ideas and new lines.

Obviously, coming out to public spaces is one of the planned activities, but it has not been feasible because of the pandemic; therefore, the web page of the initiative has some room for public participation, where people are invited to share creations showing diverse visions of the future, in formats such as images, text, audio or any other that may be broadcasted on the Internet, extending an invitation to creative speculation for new actors, in line with the four objectives the project aims for.

The first one is to activate the capacity of seizing the urban future in the whole university community and extend it to those inhabitants who have fewer chances of expressing their expectations and aims for their lifestyles in the city.

The second one is to share the wishes, hopes, dreams, or fears of inhabiting the city in the future, in the medium term, through the web platform of the **Museum of Futures**.



The third one is to engage in dialog and learn about the multimedia inputs shared via dialog forums with citizens and specialists who may interpret this information, reflect critically, and keep a record of that learning process.

The fourth and last objective is to connect the multiple futures imagined by the different participants with the so-called decision-makers to turn the results of the calls and dialogs into inputs for the actual actions of public policy.

Cooperate to create

“The project is ambitious based on modest contributions,” Silva states, to introduce some of the activities that are making progress. Besides the course he teaches, there is the work of a group of students from Universidad Icesi, from Cali, who went out on the streets to do some research and see the potential futures of the city and the impact of the pandemic. Further, the work done by some young people from Universidad de los Andes, who are designing those future cities, and from Univer-

sidad del Rosario, at the Faculty of Creative Studies, who have actively contributed to setting up the **Museum of Futures**, a web platform that offers a series of local public calls for creative production around futures and invites people to share collective experiences, is substantial.

This virtual site, which is permanently under construction, presents two collections: *Futures 2084*, which gets enriched with different ideas on how the cities can be imagined around that year, with 23 themes including justice, daily life, pollution, and, among others, identity and gender, mutually connected.

The other collection is *Futures of the Past*, a selection of literature, music, movies, and other artistic expressions and reflections that showcase the aims and fears that the future poses to the imagination throughout history.

The leader of this work is **Alma Sarmiento**, a plastic artist and main Professor at the Facultad de Creación (Faculty of Creative Studies). Her investigations and plastic works have addressed the topic of the future, grounded on writings by the French philosopher **Élie During**—who proposes that the only existing futures are “the past futures”—in a dialog with the conception of time in the Aymara language, and sets forth that the future lies behind us whereas the past is ahead of us.

During Sarmiento’s doctorate studies, these ideas got materialized into *Project 2066*, a proposal of a “fake science fiction documentary,” that collects interviews to Colombian artists whom she proposed to disguise as their own versions of octogenarians to place themselves in the year 2066 to talk and think about the beginnings of the 21st century.

With the *2084 Program/Movement of Imagined Futures from the South*, Sarmiento goes even further: “2084 aims at putting in motion thoughts about the future of Latin American cities, with the objective of activating the construction of the urban horizons of inclusion and justice.” She adds that it is an invitation to think of the crises as opportunities for change, an idea suggested by the Observatory of Latin America of The New School University, New York, and has been welcomed by other universities and cultural institutions from Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, and Germany, with the purpose of collectively thinking about the possible futures.

The power of narrations and imagination

As we listen to Professors Sarmiento and Silva, it is worth asking them, how they can transmit enthusiasm in developing the project, amidst the current situation. For the plastic artist, the answer lies in believing in the power of narration and imagination to change the course of events. She underlines that, in many places, people are turning to optimism to give sense to life amid what is happening. She recalls a phrase from the youth movement of May 1968: “let us be realistic, let us demand the impossible.”

Silva, an economist and historian, considers that the interest in thinking about a future city enables one to be both realistic and optimistic. “We become the owners of imagining what is going to happen ahead and of making it happen (...). Many situations lead us to believe that the future is getting increasingly worse, but the empirical evidence demonstrates that humanity has imagined what is going to be worse and has

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changed it.” That is why he frequently asks his students, “What do we plan for?” He answers himself, “To do.”

With this project, a long-term future was set forth: 2084. The reason for this was that they took the novel *1984*, by the British writer George Orwell, as a landmark, although in this work, published in 1949, the future is not—at all—hopeful.

Sarmiento explains that it is about playing with the two sides of the same coin: one is a rematch to 1984; the other is an estimation of where we are going to be, in view of that future projection. “It is possible to see it from many angles,” she adds. This statement is complemented by Silva: “If 1984 was the Orwell’s year, there is no reason why 2084 should be hopeless. One can imagine any other future. Besides, the young students participating in the project today, born around 2000, may get to see what will happen on that date.” ■