

# The Art of Development Images Promoting Dialogue and Alternatives to Poverty and Violence in Local Communities of Colombia

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## Abstract

*Sueños Films Colombia* is a grassroots organization based in Ciudad Bolívar, southern Bogotá-Colombia. For over ten years, this community-based project has offered diverse art activities including audiovisual training, documentary production workshops, forums on cinema and an international film festival. This innovative community organization promotes the active participation of local people, enabling them to use the arts to express themselves, to interact with others and to find collective solutions for their community.

'The Art of Development' collects material from the time that I have spent in Ciudad Bolívar and other marginalized *barrios*/neighborhoods of Bogotá and Manizales. Since May 2010, I have been assisting several projects that *Sueños Films Colombia* has organized, including filmmaking seminars and workshops, while producing ethnographic material for my Masters thesis.

Through the following images, I hope to share the power of the arts in promoting alternatives to poverty and violence, along with, even more importantly, the strength of the local Colombian people. I have been inspired by children taking their first photos, elderly learning video editing from their grandsons or neighbors, and the energy moving groups of people from different generations to develop projects collectively.

## Author's Note

Natali Rojas is a Colombian who is completing a Masters in Development and International Cooperation at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. She has a background in Sociology and Art History, and her areas of research include community development, art and media studies, communication and culture. She has practice using video, documentary films and photography together with communities to document her work. She aims to contribute to the recognition of the people she works with through her pictures, videos and articles.

**Keywords:** community, arts, films, video, cinema, grassroots, development, Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Colombia.

## 1. Ciudad Bolivar, Bogotá-Colombia

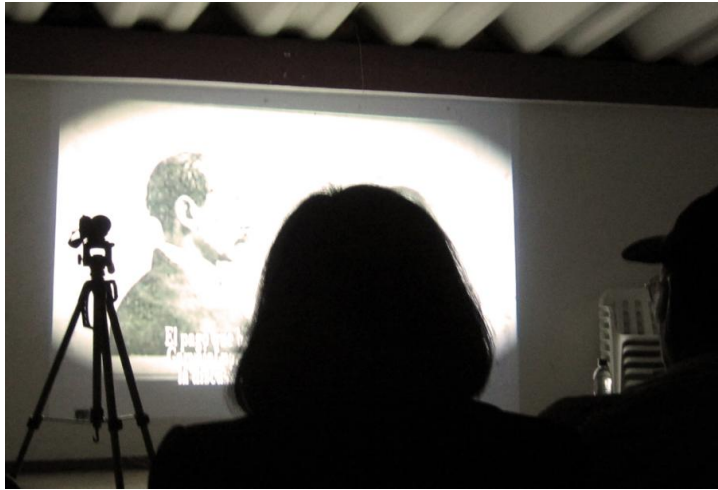


Ciudad Bolívar is located in the south of Bogotá. Although this locality is mostly rural, its urban area concentrates the poorest population (between 800,000 and 2 million estimated habitants) of the Colombian capital city. Ciudad Bolívar is a young and diverse community of immigrants and displaced people who come from all over the country. Poor urban infrastructure, informal and illegal settlements, stigmatization, and lack of communal spaces are problems Ciudad Bolívar has faced for years.

## 2. Ciudad Bolivar's audiovisual revolution



*Sueños Films Colombia* is a grassroots organization that has led an audiovisual 'revolution' in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá for over ten years. Through different art activities, including community audiovisual schools, video clubs, and its international community video and film festival *Ojo al Sancocho*, the organization promotes dialogue and alternatives to conflict and violence. The participants form creative groups that are generally diverse both in terms of backgrounds and ages.



In Ciudad Bolívar and other vulnerable communities like Usme or Soacha (located in southern Bogotá as well), families, children often spend a long time alone due to the long working days of their parents who generally work in construction, cleaning and security.

In 2010, *Sueños Films Colombia* started a program in partnership with community culture houses of different *barrios* /neighborhoods of Ciudad Bolívar to offer children free audiovisual education before and after their school times. Similar night activities began this year and are becoming popular among adults and the elderly. Unfortunately, engagement to the activities has not been consistent. Job changes, relatives' illnesses, residential movements and familial problems all result in students missing *Sueños Films Colombia's* education programs.

### 3. Ciudad Bolivar's EkoAudiovisual School



Through support fromby international cooperation and development agencies such as IOM and War Child Holland, Escuela *EkoAudiovisual* in Ciudad Bolivar was born in 2005. The project offers poor children education via films and encourages them to express themselves and tell their own stories. For five years now, the community's children, along with their families and neighbors, have collaborated together in documenting community problems such as the poor street quality, the all-too familiar violence and high rates of drug consumption.

Sebastian lives in Bella Vista-Ciudad Bolivar and has been attending the audiovisual school for just couple of months. In this video he shows what he likes doing in his free time and invite others children to join his school, his favorite activity: <http://www.youtube.com/user/ekomunicacion#p/u/1/IMzbpsqPAfg>

### 3. International community video and film festival



*Ojo al Sancocho* is the name of the international community film and video festival that *Sueños Films Colombia* has been organizing in Ciudad Bolivar since 2008. Every year, the festival welcomes more than 5,000 participants who visit from different parts of Bogotá, Colombia and the world. During one week, the festival screens audiovisual productions and runs diverse workshops that are open and free for anyone interested. Video, film, photography, performance and other visual arts are used to promote community engagement and dialogue.

Three months before the 2010 festival, the children who are part of the EkoAudiovisual School helped design the festival's poster. They were asked to draw their own ideas about what meaning the festival has for them. Their drawings were later combined into one piece.



*Ojo al Sancocho* is the only film and video festival in Bogotá promoting activities with the people of the *barrios*/neighborhoods. With knowledge about and experience in making videos, children and young people use the Festival week to produce more videos that are often screened before the end of the festival and published later on the web.

This year, the students from Semillas Creativas (a public library in one of the most dangerous *barrios* of Ciudad Bolívar, Juan Pablo II) and a visiting southern Colombia audiovisual children school produced a short video clip together. The group of youth used stop motion techniques to tell their own story through rap lyrics.

#### 4. Local stories documented via Film



In 2010, Sueños Films Colombia started a video project in Socaha, located nearby Ciudad Bolívar. *Legalizando un sueño* (making a dream legal) (<http://www.vimeo.com/17083711>) is the result of collective effort of children and the women who live Altos de la Florida, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Soacha. Rubi. In the film, women document their life during the years that they have been living in this illegal settlement, explaining how they survive and raise their children despite the social and economical difficulties. In the video, they bring up issues like the lack of water access, high erosion levels and pollution.





*Ojo al Sancocho* participates in other art and film festivals around Colombia and the world. The official selection of its films is usually shown in other *barrios*/neighborhoods similar to Ciudad Bolívar.

Last November, *Ojo al Sancocho* participated in Manizales's short film festival, running a community film workshop at *barrio El Nevado*. After five days of intensive training, fifteen youth finished a nine minute documentary that they called *Casa de Sueños e Ilusiones* (House of Dreams and Hope). In the video, they refer to the culture house of *barrio El Nevado* where they meet everyday for diverse cultural activities including circus activities, traditional music and dances. The film has been widely screen in alternative festivals and recently won an award in *Ojo al Cine Festival*.



Alaska is a neighborhood located in Usme, southern Bogotá. As in many *barrios*/neighborhoods of Ciudad Bolívar, Alaska has poor urban infrastructure. There is no potable water and the little community spaces are mostly abandoned.

As a member of Sueños Films Colombia, I documented an architectural intervention that a group of national and international non-profits made (<http://vimeo.com/17564310>). With the help of community members, the organizations renewed the only existing park in Alaska. During the shooting process children spontaneously used my camera to interview their friends. They were really happy to see themselves on the screen during the video premiere after the park was completed.

**List of videos and links:**

*La historia de Sebastian/ Sebastian story:*

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ekomunicacion#p/u/1/IMzbpsqPAfg>

*Legalizando un sueño/ making legal a dream*

<http://www.vimeo.com/17083711>

*Alaska, parque comunal/ Alaska community park*

<http://www.vimeo.com/17564310>

**Websites of interest:**

<http://ecoaudiovisual.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ekomunicacion>

<http://festivalojoalsancocho.wordpress.com/english/>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ojoalsancocho>

<http://www.urbanology.org/Bogota/>

<http://www.ciudadbolivar.gov.co>