INTRODUCTION
Improving the quality of urban management has become a major issue in recent years. Its ranking in the public policy agenda has risen because so many of the world’s people now live in cities. It importance has also increased because, in a globalised world, the struggle for market share and foreign investment is fought increasingly between major cities and city regions. Today, the competitiveness of London vis-à-vis New York is arguably more important than that between the UK and the USA. Since global victory depends in part on the quality of infrastructure provision, freedom from crime and the desirability of living in each city, urban management is a critical ingredient in establishing competitiveness.

Cities increasingly joust for the top positions in the Oscar-type league tables produced by Mercer, the Economist Intelligence Unit and others to rank them in terms of their urban excellence (http://www.citymayors.com/features/quality_survey.html). Poorer cities now compete for similar kinds of status: Cape Town recently joined 17 other cities around the world in being designated as a ‘Role Model City’ by the UN office for disaster risk; and Medellín has been appointed as ‘the most innovative city in the world’ by the Wall Street Journal and Citi (http://www.citigroup.com/citi/news/2013/130301a.htm).

The need for recognition is now so great that some governments are attempting to create completely new ‘model’ cities. Only by removing their reputation for urban chaos will they be able to attract new foreign investors to their shores. Honduras plans to create new privately run ‘charter cities’, the equivalents of Singapore or Hong Kong, as a sign of its intent to change its currently notorious reputation. Other governments are creating new ‘civilised’ enclaves which offer business communities protection from the unpleasant urban realities around them. In Africa, Nairobi plans to build Tatu city as “a model of the African city of the future and a place where everyone will undoubtedly desire to live, work, and play” (http://www.tatucity.com). Similarly, “Lagos aims to be Africa's model megacity” through reclaiming land and building a new, futuristic city: Eko Atlantic City (Cossou, 2010). And, in Ghana, the promoters of King City and Kpone-Appolonia have proclaimed that they will be nothing less than “Africa’s cities of the future” (Moukala, 2012). In Latin America, virtually self-contained urban complexes have been created, such as the Santa Fe complex in Mexico City.

Conventional wisdom tends to argue that a key ingredient in improving urban management is decentralisation. Autonomy from national decision-making is needed if they are to increase their competitiveness. They should be free to negotiate loans with commercial and multilateral agencies and encouraged to make full use of their local resources. Decentralisation will make governments more accountable to the people. Critical here, of course, is the quality of democracy. Local administrations should be freely elected and should
consult the public on major issues. A further essential ingredient is an ability to balance the financial books – higher expenditure should be financed by increased taxation or by realistic loan agreements. Technical competence is also obligatory – governments should appoint officials on the basis of their experience and expertise and eliminate all forms of nepotism, cronyism and clientelism. Needless to say, corruption is to be discouraged and the quality of monitoring is critical. Without the latter “the positive effects of decentralization are outweighed by its negative effects, such as double marginalization, with increasing corruption as a result” (Lessmann and Markwardt, 2010).

Unfortunately, when the quality of urban management is considered against the above criteria, too many cities fail to reach the required standard (Devas et al., 2003; Myers and Dietz (eds.) (2002). Too few cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America are capable of providing all of their populations with basic services. In 2010, only 34% of urban people in Sub-Saharan Africa had access to treated water piped to their homes, and only 43% had access to an ‘improved’ sanitation system (UNICEF/WHO, 2012).

While more and more cities now have elected mayors, the quality of local democracy is often flawed. Local politics is frequently corrupt and is as likely to complicate good urban management as to enhance it. Too often major cities are being run with a blatant disregard for the rules of financial accounting. Taxes and utility charges are not raised in line with the rising costs of improved infrastructure provision. Similarly, the interests of major lobbies, car drivers, construction companies, major unions and the like, too often triumph over the needs of the poor. Many cities also have over-complex administrative systems. Many for example are divided into a series of distinct political entities where different administrations compete more than they cooperate. The metropolitan areas of Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Mexico City and São Paulo, for example, have many more people living outside the central municipality than within it.

Of course, all these problems are manifest most clearly in the rapidly growing cities in the South. It is much easier to manage a city competently in Australia, Austria, Canada, New Zealand or Switzerland, perhaps the explanation why cities in those countries almost always feature at the top of the ‘most liveable or ‘best cities in the world to live in’ league tables (http://www.citymayors.com/sections/rankings_content.html). In the poor, rapidly growing cities of sub-Saharan African and the Indian sub-continent good management is infinitely more difficult. Perhaps for this reason, the multilateral finance institutions are constantly looking for models of good governance (ADB, 2004; Biglio and Dahiya, 2004; Nadarajah & Yamamoto, 2007; Roberts & Kanaley, 2006; Rojas et al., 2006; UN-HABITAT, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008; UNFPA, 2007a, 2007b; World Bank, 1992; 1999). In recent years, a number of cities in the South have appeared as exemplars of how it should be done. In Brazil, Curitiba has been applauded for its innovations in public transport and Porto Alegre for its experiences in participatory budgeting (Abers, 1998; Souza, 2001; Van Lindert and Nijenhuis, 2003). Quito, Medellín, Belo Horizonte, Montevideo and São Paulo all have appeared in the lists of exemplary cities as a result of different initiatives: urban renovation, harvesting methane to power the city and connecting slum settlements to the metro system through cable cars (Brand and Dávila, 2011; EIU 2010; Rojas et al., 2006).

A further exemplar of good urban management, and the subject of this paper, is Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. Bogotá first hit the urban management headlines in the late 1990s as the example of a city that had recovered from relative chaos to become a model of honest and competent governance. By 2005 it had a widely admired BRT system (Gómez, c. 2004; Gilbert, 2008), it had cut its crime rate and the city’s finances were extremely healthy. In October 2002, the United Nations declared Bogotá to be una ciudad ejemplo for Latin
America. Successful ex-mayors began publishing their memoires and touring the world to teach the world about Bogotá’s success (Castro and Garavito, 1994; Veeduria Distrital, 2003; Beccassino, 2000). Bogotá had suddenly achieved almost miracle status, an exemplar of the virtues of decentralisation, transparency and efficiency in public administration (Campbell, 2003; Baud and Post (eds.), 2003; Devas et al., 2003; Tendler, 2007; World Bank, 1992; 1999).

Unfortunately, Bogotá’s star status was not to last long. The mayor in charge of the city between 2008 and 2011 is under arrest and numerous councillors and former officials are either in jail or are facing charges of embezzlement and corruption. It is quite clear that a so-called ‘carousel of corruption’ operated in the city after 2008 and which led to commissions being paid on a number of public contracts including those concerning maintenance of the road system, building new BRT routes and operating the city’s ambulance system.

The current mayor, who was one of the first to denounce his predecessor’s misdeeds, is himself embroiled in a series of charges against his administration. Confidence in the mayor, both among the general public and the chattering classes, is very low. At the time of writing, March 2013, he is under threat of a recall motion and is being investigated by several control agencies and the media are constantly attacking his administration for its apparent failures. This paper is concerned with explaining how a city with a supposedly model administration could succumb so quickly to one embroiled in corruption and mismanagement.

**Bogotá: from chaos to model status**

In the early 1990s Bogotá was in the midst of a severe crisis (Castro and Garavito, 1994; Gilbert and Dávila, 2002; Vargas, 2003). A series of major electricity blackouts badly affected life in the city during 1992 and public service coverage was in decline after years of improvement. Increasing evidence of corruption in the public administration was hitting the headlines and, in 1991, the city’s mayor was actually imprisoned. In a city already notorious for its lack of security, crime rates were increasing and, by 1993, the homicide rate reached 80 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in urban Colombia. The city was also bankrupt. In 1992, when the city tried to borrow money abroad, the national government refused to guarantee the loan. In response, local creditors stopped advancing payments even on existing loans (Castro and Garavito, 1994: 81; Cárdenas et al., no date: 166).

The crisis demanded change and by the middle 2000s Bogota was substantially different. A series of competent administrations had put the public finances in order, invested heavily in public works, improved public transport and upgraded and serviced many low-income settlements. Improvements to the city’s policing, its open spaces and even the quality of driving, together with the opening of new public buildings and a radical new public transport system had managed to generate something in the way of public pride in the city (Gilbert, 2006; Gilbert and Garcés, 2008). For a city where most people had always lacked confidence in its public leaders and had always held a negative image of their city, this was a major achievement (Beccassino, 2000; Bromberg, 2003; Gilbert and Dávila, 2003; Dávila, 2004).

**The ‘miracle years’**

Various explanations have been put forward to explain Bogotá’s remarkable transformation after 1992 which can be summarised as follows.

a) *The end of co-administration and clientelism*

For years, the mayors of Bogotá complained that their power was undermined by the actions of the city council. They could not raise taxes without striking sometimes nefarious deals with councillors in order to increase the city’s revenues. The mayor was forced to offer
favours to the politicians who controlled the council; jobs had to be distributed through councillors, contracts ceded to certain favoured groups, and policies adopted, or relinquished, according to the wishes of the mayor’s supporters. The balance of power shifted dramatically with the passing of the Organic Statute in 1993. This limited the council’s responsibilities to passing laws and to supervising the actions of the executive. It thereby gave the mayor much more autonomy and flexibility in administering the city (Castro and Garavito, 1994).

b) Good mayors

Until 1992, the mayor of Bogotá was an appointee of the national president but the national constitution of 1991 decreed that future mayors would be elected. Bogotá was then the beneficiary of seven elections each of which produced a highly responsible mayor, usually a candidate who had stood against the traditional political system (Bromberg, 2003). The independence of Bogotá voters, and particularly their wholesale distrust of traditional party politics, severely weakened the power of the political parties, their councillors and national representatives. Between 1992 and 2004, there were few complaints about the honesty or competence of the mayors and even the election of the first left-wing mayor (2004-7) did not lead to widespread criticism of the city’s government (Pizano, 2003: 181).

c) Technocracy not democracy?

Bromberg (2003) has argued that: “Bogotá changed because technocratic elites governed it”. Supported by a popular mandate, the mayor could identify certain priorities, appoint their own teams and push through their programmes as best they could. Unlike the situation in the 1980s, when it is argued that political appointees became embedded in the main city agencies and the city payroll was used to reward political allies, most high level appointments after 1993 were made on predominantly technical grounds. And, protected by the Organic Statute, these officials were able to administer their agencies with a degree of autonomy. National legislation also protected the public utilities from political interference by subjecting them to a detailed series of rules about finance, charging and general performance.

d) Continuity of administration

Democratic rule sometimes produces instability but it did not do so in Bogotá. The first seven elected mayors all served their full term and their period in office was gradually lengthened from two years to four. Even more impressive was the continuity in policy with most heads of agency staying in power throughout the administration and, occasionally, beyond. As a result, several major projects, like the BRT Transmilenio system and Metrovivienda continued unaffected by the change of mayor (Silva, 2009: 149).

e) More resources

A further sign that Bogotá’s mayors were both responsible and brave was their ability to increase the city’s income and sometimes to raise taxes. Local government spending in the city rose from a little more than 1% of the city’s gross product in 1980 to over 4% in 2004 (Hernández, 2005). An increasing share of this spending went into investment projects rather than in paying employees. Most mayors maintained a policy of ‘fiscal orthodoxy’ and were prepared to raise taxes and levy new charges, something that guaranteed a regular budget surplus (Hernández, 2005).

f) Privatisation and commercialisation

In Colombia, privatisation has occupied a prominent role in the national agenda since 1990. The neo-liberal regime initiated by President César Gaviria encouraged foreign trade and
investment and sought to reduce inefficiency and bloated public payrolls. In the country as a whole, the private sector gradually increased its hold over banking, health care, power generation and telecommunications. But Bromberg (2003) argues that the local authorities in Colombia have never been strong believers in neoliberalism and, in Bogotá, privatisation has been rather limited. After a major political struggle, the street cleaning and rubbish collection company was closed in 1993. The collection of taxes was privatised the same year, as was responsibility for issuing vehicle number plates and administering mechanical checks on buses and trucks (Castro and Garavito, 1994: 91-2; Piza, no date). The electricity company was partially privatised in 1997 and some private sector input was permitted in the provision of secondary schooling (through concessions to run new colleges) and in the health sector. However, after long debates neither the water nor the telephone service was privatised. The most important way that neoliberalism affected the District administration is in the manner in which services are provided. Commercial principles have been adopted gradually by most of the main service agencies and their performance has certainly improved. De-capitalisation of the electricity company is justified, even on the left, on the grounds that the capital generated is used by the local authority to finance necessary investment in the city. Privatisation has played some role in reforming the way that Bogotá is managed but, in comparison with what has occurred in many other parts of Latin America, it is difficult to argue that privatisation has been at the heart of the transformation.

From honest administration to corruption

During the ‘miracle years’, virtually every mayor increased the resources available to the city and generally spent the money on useful projects. The separation of politics from the bureaucracy to allow the mayor greater freedom of action from the council seemed to work well. The level of honesty and transparency rose. Why did the improvement not continue?

Clearly, the rot really began with the election of a bad mayor. Between 1992 and 2003, most of the mayors were independents who won power because they were did not represent the political groups who bogotanos had learned to distrust. In the election of 2003, this pattern changed and a left-wing candidate won mainly because he gained a majority of the working class votes. While his pro-poor promises not unreasonably attracted the votes of the poor, Luis Eduardo Garzón promised not to “hacer populismo con la Alcaldía” (El Espectador, 2007). An evaluation of his first three years in power was highly complementary, noting the advances in education for the poor, economic development and public finance (BCV, 2007: 4). There was also praise for his anti-hunger programme, the provision of hot and cold lunches to 650,000 or so beneficiaries, the reduction in child mortality and for the decline in poverty (El Tiempo, 2007c). The only major complaint about the administration concerned security and the limited achievements in transport. Views today differ over whether or not he was a good mayor but he left office with high ratings in the opinion polls with no obvious signs that the city was in decline. He may have been indecisive, have allowed some councillors too much influence within the administration and he was certainly culpable in designing some poor transport contracts but, at worst, he can only be judged to have been an indifferent mayor.

Unfortunately, his successor proved to be a disaster. Like Garzón, Samuel Moreno (2008-11) won the election mainly on the basis of working class votes. The problem was that Moreno came from the ANAPO party which had a somewhat disreputable history of introducing the worst kind of populist policies. Worse still his family had a reputation for corruption when occupying positions of power. One interviewee argues that the left-wing Democratic Pole party made a major mistake in allying with him. He was rich and was not from the left. He was backed because he was considered to be a rather charming spokesperson for their cause.
in the absence of a plausible candidate of their own. He also possessed considerable political 
skills having served several years as a Senator, something that was manifest when as mayor-
elect he quickly made deals with several other political parties to guarantee a majority in the 
city council.

It is strongly suspected that this majority support was constructed on the basis of deals with 
councillors to appoint key representatives in the government bureaucracy. Certainly, the 
council appointed some very problematic people to posts in the control agencies. The 
Comptroller, Miguel Ángel Morales-Russi (2008-11), despite his slogan to “rescue public 
morality and ethics” was a particularly dubious appointment. The appointment of the City 
Solicitor, Francisco Rojas Birry, was also thought to be suspicious. Similarly, the City 
Observer (veedor), a person directly appointed by the mayor and whose role is to advise him 
about any problems in his administration, was also a questionable nomination and certainly 
did little to advertise the increasing signs of corruption in major contracts.

These appointments and increasing Council influence in several key city agencies created the 
opportunity for corruption to spread. In March 2009, the anti-corruption tsar claimed that the 
administration was being undermined by clientelism (Lancheros, 2009) and soon some 
members of his own party alliance were identifying areas of the administration that were 
actually corrupt (Semana, 2010a). It has subsequently been shown that major construction 
and maintenance contracts, e.g. that along the new BRT route along Calle 26, involved 
commissions being paid to the Moreno brothers. These commissions were handled by 
mediaries with experience in corrupt dealing at the national level, but it is clear that 
certain councillors were also devising their own illicit schemes. A profitable deal was 
concocted between Councillor Hipólito Moreno and Health Secretary Héctor Zambrano, 
which allowed two construction companies to win a contract for running an ambulance 
service although they had no experience at all in this area.

The flood of accusations about the ‘carousel of corruption’, led to Mayor Moreno being 
suspended and later stripped of his office for improprieties in the appropriation of city 
contracts. He resigned just over six months before the end of his four-year administration. 
The Attorney General’s office argued for pre-trial detention and Moreno was arrested on 23 
September 2011. Several other important officials have subsequently been imprisoned. 
Francisco Rojas Birry was sentenced to eight years in jail and ordered to pay a fine of 
approximately US$200,000 (Kiencyke, 2012); Héctor Zambrano has just been sent to pre-trial 
imprisonment over the ambulance contracts (El Colombiano, 2013); and currently some 15 
councillors and ex-councillors are under investigation for corruption.

How did corruption regain its hold over the administration in Bogotá? Many local observers 
claim that the rot began during Luis Eduardo Garzón’s administration (2004-2008). He 
allowed certain councillors, particularly those belonging to his own party alliance, to appoint 
people in the bureaucracy and particularly in the control agencies. This kind of abuse 
expanded enormously under Samuel Moreno. As a result, the control agencies did not 
perform their duty of defending the public, controlling the behaviour of District officials and 
supervising public contracts. Councillors had once again begun to acquire influence within 
the administration by appointing their friends to important posts.

**The return of honest administration**

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1 Given the relative autonomy of the press in Colombia and the amount of coverage given to corruption in 
most of the daily and weekly journals, it is perhaps surprising that more was not done earlier to stop 
corruption in Bogotá. On the issue of corruption and the press see: **
When Gustavo Petro and Carlos Vicente de Roux had denounced the carrousel of corruption and the mayor, his brother, Lilian Pardo and the Nule brothers had been arrested, that appeared to be the end of Bogotá’s problems. Unfortunately, optimism about the state of Bogotá’s administration was short-lived.

Former Senator Gustavo Petro of the Progressive party, an offshoot of the somewhat discredited Polo Democrático, won the election with only 32% of the vote. He won in large part because the opposition candidates failed to agree to support a compromise candidate. He won mainly on the basis of working class votes but while he was unpopular with many for his guerrilla past, he had a strong reputation for honesty.

However, his administration came under attack almost immediately from four sources. First, the media did not like the new administration because it threatened to introduce policies that would transform the city. Second, the mayor had won the election with a small proportion of the votes and lacked a majority in the Council, with only eight out of 45 belonging to his Progressive party. And, since a significant number of Councillors were under investigation for corruption, they were determined to deny support to his initiatives and some even sought revenge through launching legal challenges to his administration through the offices of the District Solicitor and the Controller. Third, certain powerful national actors were also hostile to the new mayor. Petro was an enemy of ex-president Álvaro Uribe, whose administration had sought to improve security in the country by destroying the main guerrilla organisations. He was therefore totally hostile to the idea of a former guerrilla becoming mayor of the nation’s capital city.¹⁷ In addition, Petro had strongly criticised Uribe’s links with paramilitary movements. Similarly, the Attorney General is no friend of the mayor and launched an investigation in September 2012 into Petro’s links with the carrousel of corruption. Finally, the national government of President Manuel Santos was concerned that a successful Petro administration might win more votes in the country’s largest city. Equally, he was worried should the mayor’s radical agenda undermine the Bogotá economy and its administrative machine. As such, he was determined to keep a close eye on the new administration.

Many of his enemies were affronted by Mayor Petro’s radical agenda. His urban plan promised to reduce inequality, control urban sprawl, to reduce the cost of water and transport for the poor, to increase taxes for the better off, to reduce the prevalence of guns in the city and to deal with drug addiction. He was also determined to try to reduce the profits of private operators of TM, rubbish collection, secondary schools in concession. Much of this agenda threatened powerful interests in the city.

However, the real problem was that it soon became clear his administration was proving less than capable of implementing its policies. He is consistently accused of introducing policies without having conducted the relevant studies, e.g. 17% cut in rubbish collection charges, modifications to the valorisation plan, the changes being made to the POT (El Tiempo, 2013a). The inexperience of many in his team has clearly been a problem and was reflected in his decision to ask his cabinet to resign after six months.¹⁸ He claimed that that too many of his team lacked experience in running large enterprises and appeared to be out of their depth. The decision reflected his concern that he had only four years to change the structure of the city; he needed to implement his policies quickly and it was not occurring. It was this impatience to bring change that was perhaps the reason why the administration made some key errors. The most notorious was the decision to take rubbish collection under state control because the operators were making what he considered to be excessive profits. While the argument was not wrong, its application was a disaster. When it began operations in December 2012, the new agency lacked sufficient collection vehicles and the trained staff to
do the job. Pictures of piles of uncollected rubbish in the streets hit the headlines. Another controversial decision was to change the plans for transport improvements along the emblematic Seventh Avenue by shelving the plans for a light Transmilenio service and to build a tram system instead. This decision led to the eventual resignation of the head of Transmilenio on the grounds that the action was illegal; the law precludes undertaking new studies when existing contracts have not been terminated. His resignation was one of many in the agency; the current incumbent was the fourth director to be appointed in ten months.

Petro’s public image is not helped by his habit of regularly upsetting significant lobby groups. He dismayed aficionados of bullfighting by banning such events in the city, he alienated taxi drivers by changing the pico y placa timetable and closing part of Carrera Séptima to cars, he worries elite households by threatening to raise valorisation charges and he irritates many through his constant use of Twitter. His difficult (recio) personality has upset people who were once his friends and allies (Semana 2013a). As one commentator recently put it, the main “leader of the opposition is himself” (Rueda, 2012). With the exception of his own officials, none of my interviewees commented favourably on his record.

These charges have taken their toll on the mayor’s reputation and the media are constantly denouncing his administration’s incompetence. One recent editorial claims that eight million bogotanos are suffering “the worst mayor of all time” (Nieto de Samper, 2013). The opinion polls are less than favourable; towards the end of March 2013, his favourability rating fell to 31%, the lowest rate among the mayors of the largest cities in the country (El Tiempo, 2013b). An attempt to mount a recall referendum is under way and his opponents appear to have obtained the 289,263 signatures that they require to proceed.19

In addition, he and his officials are under seemingly permanent attack from the control agencies. The Attorney General launched an investigation into supposed links between Petro and the leaders of the carousel of corruption (Semana, 2012). Similarly the District’s Solicitor and Comptroller are attacking him. The council rejected his request for approval of a large loan to finance his transport projects and are unlikely to approve his valorisation plan. Even his own appointment, the City Observer, is attacking him for his failure to implement some of his policies – in his first year he managed to spend rather little of his investment budget (Veeduria Distrital, 2013).20 Some believe that one or other of these legal cases, and particularly the charges relating to the cost of the problematic rubbish collection fiasco, may lead to his removal from office.

While few mention his achievements, and after all he has had only fourteen months in office, some significant steps have been taken. His development plan, which was actually approved by the council, represents a major step in reducing inequality in the city. Much of the long delayed 26th Street BRT project is now operational. His disarmament policy has received widespread support and may well have helped to reduce the murder rate.21 He has set up the first drug treatment centres in the city. He has provided six cubic metres of free water each month to those living in the poorest districts. He has attempted to reduce peak loads on Transmilenio by cutting the fares for travelling off peak. He has halved the prohibition on driving under the Pico and Placa programme to seven hours for private cars and taxis. He has increased the education budget by around half and increased that for health by around one third. Whatever else he may be accused of, he cannot be charged for any lack of ambition or energy.

Compared to the supposedly golden years of mayors Castro, Mockus and Peñalosa (1992 to 2003), Bogotá has most definitely lost its shine. Admittedly Petro can claim that no-one says that his administration is worse than that of his predecessor, that his development plan includes many excellent ideas and that, so far at least, there is no sign that his administration
is anything but honest. In maintaining its integrity, it helps that the mayor appointed an independent and critical person as Observer of the city – something that was definitely not the case during the previous two administrations.

In addition, Bogotá is belatedly cleaning out its stables. The past sins of the councillors, contractors and administration are gradually being punished. The authorities are investigating the activities of the former mayor and his brother, both of whom are currently incarcerated. The former City Solicitor and Comptroller are in prison and fifteen current and former councillors are under investigation for various crimes to do with corruption. Gradually, the delayed public works are being completed and while too many experienced administrators have been lost, some competent and honest people are still occupying key positions.

Policies are being implemented that should help to redistribute income - something that is badly needed in such an unequal city. It should also be pointed out that most indicators of the quality of life continue to be favourable. While it is possible that they might deteriorate in the next couple of years as a result of his administration’s policies, that is not the case at the moment. According to an official study by the National Department of Statistics conducted in 2012, 76% of bogotanos felt less poor than five years previously (El Tiempo, 2013e). Unemployment has continued to fall from 11.8 in 2007 to 9.5% in January 2013 (DANE, 2013; El Tiempo, 2013c). And, the supply of water and sanitation continues to be virtually universal and the homicide rate fell from 21.9 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011 to 16 in 2012.23

CONCLUSION

What does the recent experience of Bogotá contribute to our thinking about good urban governance?

First, it shows that while the quality of urban management can improve, often dramatically, even in cities of the South, relatively small changes in personnel or circumstances can stop that improvement in its tracks. In the case of Bogotá the election of a problematic mayor led to rapid deterioration. Corruption in the public contracting process is a constant danger in any city and even when stopped, as it generally did in Bogotá between 1992 and 2008, it can quickly reappear. As one councillor put it to me, “the corrupt in Colombia constantly seek out new opportunities. If one avenue is closed, politicians find another.”

Second, the Bogotá case shows that the relationship between politicians and technocrats is a delicate one. Good councillors do hold the bureaucracy in check and prevent abuses of power. But opportunistic and/or dishonest councillors infiltrate the bureaucracy and undermine the control agencies virtually guaranteeing that the quality of urban management will deteriorate. Indeed, one major bizarre paradox of the public in Bogotá is that they attribute improvements in the city’s administration to the popular election of mayors and yet they damn ‘politicians’ for any signs of weakness.

Third, decentralisation can facilitate better quality governance, and it most certainly helped in the transformation of Bogotá and Medellín. But, it is no panacea. After all, Colombia has 1,102 municipalities and few have the capacity to manage themselves properly. New scandals are constantly hitting the headlines and in recent years the mayors of many important Colombian cities have been suspended and even imprisoned (Posada, 2007a; 2007b; Semana, 2006; El Tiempo, 2007a). In August 2005, mayors in some 200 municipalities were subject to some kind of judicial investigation. Similarly, the governors in numerous departments have been arrested for corruption (El Tiempo, 2013f). The local administration of mineral rights has been full of abuses, including bribery on a massive scale (Semana, 2010). Clearly, violence in large areas of the country has not helped but the Colombian experience suggests...
that even if decentralisation may be desirable it is most certainly not sufficient (Faguet and Sánchez, 2008; Velásquez, 2009).

Finally, Bogotá’s ‘stalled miracle’ shows that advocates of good urban management should not only look at the manuals of good practice. For just as much can be learned from examples of bad practice. The Bogotá case is useful insofar as it shows both how a city can improve its performance and that any improvement is fragile. No improvement is permanent and as Alice found out in Through the Looking Glass – you have to keep running to stay in the same place.

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Semana (2010b) Así fue el petro-desfalco, 2 October.

Semana (2012a) Procurador abre investigación preliminar al alcalde Petro por presuntos vínculos con los Nule, 6 September.

Semana (2012b) ¿Qué le pasa a Gustavo Petro?, 16 June.


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1 Honduras signed a deal for an initial investment of 15 million dollars to create the first “Private City” in the country. It will be built in Trujillo, in the Department of Colón (www.hondurasnews.com/honduras-approves-private-cities-project/). Although the country’s constitutional court blocked this initiative
it now seems to have been revived.

Located within Greater Nairobi, off the ultra-modern Thika Highway, “the city is modeled as a dynamic mixed-use, mixed-income environment that will be home to an estimated 70,000 residents and 30,000 day visitors”.

Santa Fe consists mainly of highrise buildings surrounding the third largest mall in Latin America (Centro Comercial Santa Fe). The district also includes a residential area and three college campuses, among other facilities.

Even discounting the desperate situation of cities in the midst of civil war or recovering from it.

The ‘world’s most livable cities’ is an informal name given to any list of cities as they rank on a reputable annual survey of living conditions. Two examples are the Mercer Quality of Living Survey and the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Global Liveability Report. Since 2007, the lifestyle magazine Monocle has also published an annual list of livable cities.

This investigation began in 2005 with a grant from the Leverhulme Trust, although the author had conducted research on urban issues in the city for many years previously. It has continued through regular visits to the city. The information in this paper has been collected through many interviews with the mayors of the city and their top officials. It has also benefited from Bogotá’s large array of statistics and information and the often excellent news coverage given to local issues.

Caicedo was convicted for distributing auxilios to individual councillors at a time when the Constitution prohibited this practice (he was finally cleared of the charge in 2012). The distribution of auxilios was an important way in which councillors maintained their political support. Under threat of a jail sentence themselves, most of the councillors eventually returned the auxilios.

Unfortunately, democracy did not result in many municipalities in the country electing responsible mayors, arguably, the only major cities in the country that have benefited consistently from democracy are Bogotá and Medellín. Nor is there any real evidence that the democratic election of mayors improved the general level of honesty at the municipal level.

Although several members of the Garzón cabinet complained in interview about the amount of time that they were forced to spend in the Council defending their policies. In addition, there is a growing feeling that the Contralor and the Solicitor, both appointed by the Council, have tended to mount political campaigns against office holders. This explains why most high officials in the current administration have insurance policies to cover potential legal costs.

ANAPO was founded by Colombia’s last dictator, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. His daughter Maria Eugenia Rojas stood as the party’s presidential candidate in 1974. She and her two sons, Samuel and Néstor Iván have all served as national congressmen and senators. I have talked to several people in the poor suburbs who recall Maria Eugenia distributing sweets to the children in those areas. This was a trivial but revealing example of her populist style of politics.

His mother virtually destroyed the national housing institute by offering houses with no deposit and then failing to collect the mortgage payments, his father has a rather notorious business reputation and his brother escaped well-based charges of corruption when he was mayor of the city of Bucaramanga.

Some even claim that these people were elected by councillors who would be rewarded by sharing part of the appointees’ salary (Bustos, 2011).

He led the election campaign for Moreno.

As a young man he became an active member of the 19th of April Movement, which later evolved into the Alianza Democrática M-19, along with two of his close associates Antonio Navarro Wolff and Guillermo Asprilla. In 1985, Petro was arrested by the army for the crime of illegal possession of arms. He was convicted and sentenced to 18 months in prison. Much later he became first a Congressman and then a member of the Senate.

Approximately half of the cabinet were replaced.

This is unlikely to be successful insofar as recall motions have never prospered in Colombia (Bromberg, 2013; Lancheros, 2012). To request a recall motion the signatures of 40% of the total votes of the last election are required.
By 31 December 2012 actual outgoings on investment had only reached 62% of that requested in the Budget (Cuadro No. 1).

Up to 1 April 2012 the police reported that they had captured 75,000 soft arms and y 613 illegal firearms. Unfortunately, as many as one million guns may be held in the city.

It is wrong to suggest that previous administrations did not help the poor. They certainly guaranteed that Bogotá has better service provision than most other cities in Latin America and began construction of a decent public transport system. Both service provision and transport have been subsidised, large areas of informal housing have been legalised and provided with infrastructure and services. The authorities have also built parks, libraries and neighbourhood leisure facilities in the low-income settlements.

During January 2013, the rate was even lower at 13 (El Tiempo, 2013d). The city benefits from a 99.9% network coverage for water, electricity, sewerage and rubbish collection and 89.4% for gas (DANE, 2013).

In the Department of Casanare, six of the last seven elected governors have been suspended and/or jailed.

Of course, corruption at the national level is also denounced regularly.