

## **Hannah Sheerin – Colombia, Summer 2017**

My stay in Colombia began with 2 weeks in the capital Bogota where, affiliated with the university Javeriana, I was worked on a propositional design project sited in the barrio of Potosi in Ciudad Bolivar –the largest favela in the world. Only recently legalised, Potosi holds a perception of insecurity that is disconnected from the reality; despite obvious problems of connectivity, employment and overcrowding that are typical of informal settlements, my experience was of a lively and bustling community.

Given an informal tour of the area from one of the community leaders we observed that successful public spaces were synonymous with areas of dense and varied social infrastructure, and so we proposed a design that superimposed multiple functions in one (currently disused) space. This would encourage a longer schedule of activities, thereby increasing the presence of people who naturally police the space and create an impression of security.

It was a privilege to visit the barrio and allowed me a glimpse of another side to the city, rarely experienced by a western tourist. It was an amazing insight into a very different way of life, and my lasting impression was not of the difficulties they faced, but of the productivity and joyousness of everyone I encountered.

I then spent a further 2 1/2 weeks travelling other parts of the country; visiting Cali, Medellin, Salento, Cartagena and Tayrona National Park, all of which were amazing.

Medellin was of particular interest having been the heart of the country's violent past, and now attracting thousands of 'Escobar tourists'. With a dissertation focus of post-conflict cities it was amazing to see how much of a change the whole country has come in such a short space of time, and also observe the underlying but continual effects of the war on drugs. It was great to experience how the application of architecture and infrastructure in such simple ways had had such a transformative effect on spaces in the city, such as the many library parks, and the cable cars and escalators connecting the favelas to the city centre. This effect is exemplified by Carrera 13 - a barrio in the west of Medellin – that has evolved from being the 2<sup>nd</sup> most dangerous neighbourhood in the world just 7 years ago, to attracting 500 tourists/day coming to travel the outdoor escalators, admire the graffiti-art and hear the stories of the city.

Though the US government are still issuing warnings against Colombian travel, and the Netflix Narcos series drags out the countries traumatic history, my experience was of unbelievable hospitality from some of the nicest and most welcoming people I have ever met. It was an experience I will never forget.