

BOGOTA

The ex-mayor of Bogota, Enrique Penalosa, has argued that if we ever achieve a successful city for children, we will have built the perfect city for all citizens. In Bogota, the capital of Colombia, they have tried to fulfil this ideal by transforming what was once a chaotic city - badly affected by congestion and gripped by fear of crime - into one far better for children. Penalosa is largely credited with this transformation through the large-scale reforms he initiated at the turn of the century. However, if other mayors hadn't secured the city's finances before him and developed his reforms afterwards, the changes wouldn't have been so successful.

One of the first steps he took was to clear a large slum that dominated the centre of Bogota and replace it with a large public space. The slum had been a no-go zone for police and had effectively created a barrier between the affluent north and the more deprived south of the city. By demolishing it, the city was immediately brought closer together. Having cleared one space, Penalosa's administration then expropriated the land of a private country club in the north of the city. Its golf course and polo fields were converted into a free park with sports facilities for all.

They then started to tackle congestion and the lack of facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. Wide pavements were built and cars were prevented from parking on them - a move that led to huge protests. The government built miles and miles of cycle lanes and set up a huge network of buses, again using separate lanes. They also imposed restrictions on car use and increased taxes on petrol, the proceeds from which went back into the new transport system. Finally, they poured money into education - building new schools and a network of libraries, several in the most deprived neighbourhoods. The schools were also given thousands of computers connected to both the Internet and the libraries. The programme resulted in a huge increase in enrolment and school attendance.

During his time in office, Penalosa did not escape criticism and after his three-year term in office, he failed to be re-elected in subsequent attempts. Some critics hate aspects of the road laws; others complain new housing is far from their original homes in the city centre.