

OPEN STREETS TRENDS & OPPORTUNITIES





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OPEN STREETS

Open Streets or **Ciclovías** temporarily repurpose city streets into car-free spaces for people complemented by programmed activities fulfilling the intent of the program. These programs include encouraging physical activity, civic engagement, local economic development, community development, recovery and revitalization of public spaces and/or changing transportation behaviour through walking and cycling advocacy.

From 1974 forward, Open Streets have been experienced in 496 cities in 27 countries on all continents. Host cities range from large metropolises such as Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Toronto, to small towns with fewer than 10,000 residents. The prevailing model and city of reference being Bogotá's Ciclovía that began in the 1970s. Open Streets programs are multi-sectoral involving numerous partners in government, private, and non-profit sectors making Open Streets organization dynamic and collaborative.

In Latin American cities, studies have shown where Open Streets programs are implemented with regularity their benefits are multiple. Open Streets have been shown to:

- Provide opportunities for meeting physical activity recommendations for both adults and children;ⁱ
- Improve quality of life measurements;ⁱⁱ
- Promote social capital;ⁱⁱⁱ
- Encourage increased uptake in cycling for transportation;
- Reduce particulate pollution and street noise;^{iv, v}
- Increase local business activity;^{vi}

Open Streets are ultimately a platform for change in any community – whether the goals are to improve community health, engagement, or advocate for more sustainable and human-scale cities.

Based on recent expansion of Open Streets throughout the world, this brief summarizes trends in the Open Streets movement based on findings of Open Streets surveys in the United States and Latin America.

The brief highlights the results of papers curated for Active Living Research's Physical Activity in Public Spaces Supplement in Preventive Medicine. Papers by Hipp et al. (2016) and Sarmiento et al. (2016) explicitly surveyed Open Streets and Ciclovía programs in the United States and Latin American cities, respectively. These surveys were complemented by in-depth interviews with willing program organizers of 32 unique programs across the United States and in five Latin American cities to understand measures of success and the factors discouraging or enabling program sustainability. The lessons learned offer insights for future Open Streets program planning.

THE RISE OF OPEN STREETS

The sheer number of Open Streets programs have increased throughout the world since the 1970's following the prevailing model of Bogotá's Ciclovía.^{vii} (see Figure 1) The most significant growth in the movement has been seen in the last 16 years.



Figure 1: Ciclovía, Bogotá, Colombia. Ciclovía began in 1974 with a short route and today covers more than 120km of Colombia's capital city. The program occurs every Sunday and holiday from 7:00 am – 2:00 pm. The Ciclovía route is complemented by the Recreovía, a series of activity hubs providing physical activity classes along the Ciclovía route. (Photo from IDRD, Bogotá)

Open Streets expansion in Latin American cities (see Figure 2) account for 93% of all regularly occurring programs and approximately 90% of those programs began after 2000. In the specific study of 67 Latin American cities from seven countries by Sarmiento et al., 67.5% of programs were implemented after 2010. Programs in Latin American cities occur with great frequency; 56.7% of programs operated weekly and overall frequency of surveyed programs ranged from 8-169 dates per year (some occur weekly and include holidays whereas others occur on a monthly or seasonal frequency).^{viii}

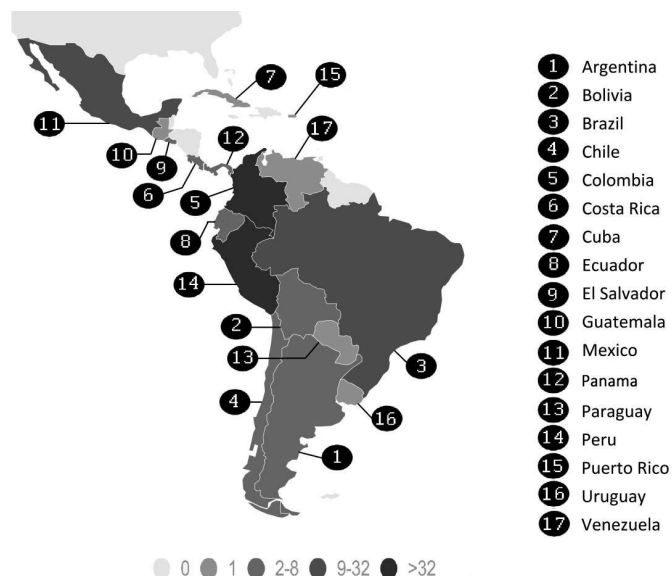


Figure 2: Countries with Ciclovía programs in Latin America from 1974-2016. The grayscale corresponds to the number of programs per country. Only programs that occur at least twice per year are included.^{viii}

In the United States, as of January 2016, Open Streets have taken place in 135 different cities (see Figure 3), though the majority have occurred with limited frequency.

- 62% of U.S. programs with data available were found to occur only once per year;
- 15% occurred six or more times per year;
- And only 2.8% occurred weekly.

Of 32 programs surveyed 13 stated they were open to increased frequency but expansion would require overcoming significant barriers including imbalances in expenses (permitting, police, barricades, etc.) and funding.^{ix}

PLANNING AN OPEN STREETS ROUTE

Open Streets route selection can affect traffic patterns, program participation, and general program success. Planning an Open Streets route requires balancing resident opinions, traffic management, emergency services, hotels and major destinations, and overall attractiveness of a route.^{xi} Best practices from Latin America suggest that routes should connect different socioeconomic areas, a city's tourist attractions such as parks, museums and cultural attractions, and shopping districts.^{xi} Residential proximity to a route also increases the likelihood of participation.^{xi}

In the surveyed Latin American cities:^{viii}

Route lengths vary between

1 & 113.6 km

Median length:

3 km

74.6%

of routes are less than 10 km in length.

95.5% noted that their routes had connectivity to suggested sites such as parks, plazas, sports venues, tourist destinations, beaches and other points of interest unique to their city.

94.8%

of routes included a main street or commercial iconic street.

89.3%

routed through different economic areas. 53.7% included low-income areas with the intention of fostering social inclusion.

In the surveyed U.S. cities:^{ix}

All Open Streets in the United States have route lengths

<16 km

*with the exception of Phoenix Silent Sundays

Routes often change locations with each date in the U.S. context in attempt to highlight different districts or neighbourhoods, infrastructure, parks, cultural assets or encourage new participants.

Due to shorter route lengths, it's difficult to determine whether Open Streets in U.S. cities have been able to connect different socioeconomic areas, which would encourage social inclusion.

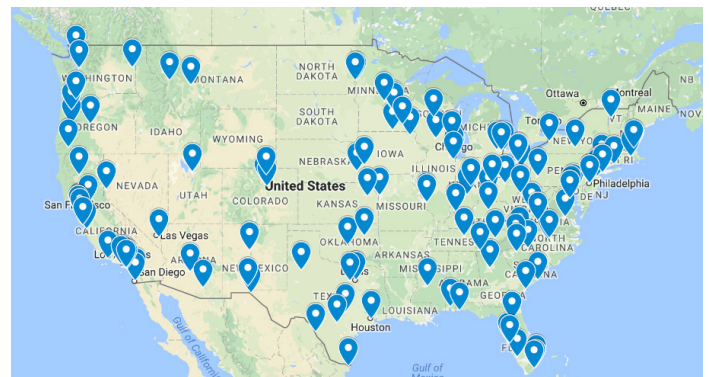


Figure 3: Open Streets Programs in the United

COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

OPEN STREETS AS A PLATFORM FOR YOUR CAUSE!

A common characteristic of Open Streets programs in comparison with other street closure festivals is complementary activities. These activities are varied in focus depending on the motivation for the Open Streets program. These complementary activities broaden the audience at Open Streets by providing additional activities beyond walking and cycling as well as creating educational opportunities for participants (see Figure 4).

In both Latin American and U.S. cities complementary programming is an important feature for sustainability of Open Streets. In the surveyed Latin American programs, all offered at least one complementary activity with the main activity being a physical activity class (94%; see Box 1). Approximately 80% of all Latin American programs also offered a cycling-focused complementary activity.^{viii}

Evidence suggests that U.S. cities have similar if not higher numbers of complementary activities and a more diverse purpose at Open Streets.



Figure 4: Complementary activities include cooking classes, skipping, yoga classes, Zumba classes, outreach for city departments or causes and more.

BOX 1: RECREOVIA AT BOGOTÁ'S CICLOVIA

Recreovía began in 1995 as a complementary activity to Bogotá's Ciclovia. Recreovía began with one hub of traditional games but attendance was low. Coordinators used their resourcefulness and persistence to change directions and implemented an aerobics class. Participation grew steadily to 12 hubs in 1996 and to 31 hubs in 2005 with 1.5 million participants. From 2005-2009 Recreovía expanded again to 79 hubs and 3.4 million participants and classes started to be offered outside of Ciclovia days. The Recreovía program now has its own staff, budget, and has transformed into an independent program.^{ix}



SUSTAINABILITY & SCALING UP

To provide consistent opportunities for participation, Open Streets dates must occur with regular frequency. With increased or regular frequency comes the need to sustain the program which requires resources in the form of funding, staff, political support, volunteers, and civic support.

In Latin American Open Streets funding is mainly public.

79%

of programs are led by public entities from government.

In Latin America, a variety of factors contribute to the continued sustainability and there is no one special feature that ensures success. Program organizers and staff often must be creative and resourceful in periods with limited or lost political support resulting in reduced funding. In some cases, supportive public opinion and the work of committed champions have been critical to maintaining portions of Open Streets routes that would otherwise be cut from programs (See Box 2). Similar comments for increased route length have led to increased scale of these programs.^{viii}

In the United States Open Streets to-date are implemented with limited frequency. 62% of U.S. programs with data available were found to occur only once per year. Based on results from 32 interviewed Open Streets organizers in the U.S., 13 programs would be open to scaling-up their programs to 12 dates per year if a number of barriers could be overcome.^x

Consistent funding was noted as the greatest challenge to Open Streets programs in the U.S. as organizers, particularly those outside of city government, have to creatively bring resources together from a mixture of grants and private funding. Beyond the fundraising,

challenges include the costs of street closures (the permitting process, police, and barricades) which are inconsistently enforced across different cities, branding/communication costs with routes that change locations frequently, and multiplicity of messaging about the goals of Open Streets programs.^x

BOX 2: INSPIRATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Mexico City's Open Streets Program: Paseo Dominical Muévete en Bici

Paseo Dominical Muévete en Bici was implemented in 2007 as part of city-wide policy for active transportation. Over 9 years the program grew from 5km to 55km. Today, citizens demand the program's continuation and expansion. Surveys show that participants spend an average of 3 hours at the event, spend 12-17 US dollars per event, and 20% of participants reported biking for transportation following participation in this program.^{xii}



DISCUSSION

It's undeniable that Open Streets programs have the potential to make a positive impact on our communities. Practitioners see this potential based on the sheer number of cities implementing Open Streets programs in cities around the world despite only a small body of research demonstrating the benefits of these programs.

The recent lessons learned from Latin American cities suggest that we should continue to look to them as role models in the Open Streets movement. With greater frequency, longer routes, public and civic support, Latin American Open Streets programs have been able to sustain themselves over time and many have continued to grow despite facing challenges for funding and/or political support. And while growth has occurred in the sheer number of Open Streets in the United States, the multiple barriers to growth and sustainability have yet to be overcome.

To overcome these barriers evaluation and research of Open Streets should continue. Individual Open Streets programs should pursue in-depth evaluation of their programs measuring beyond simple participation counts and social media feedback. They should critically analyze their budgets to make their programs as cost-effective as possible. Results of this work should not be done in isolation and if shared they can help inform this growing body of evidence to further understand the benefits of these programs and to make the case for their growth and expansion. Additionally, more research should be focused on the policy context that increases the cost of U.S. Open Streets programs. This research could inform a model of Open Streets that could be replicated across multiple cities.

**To learn more about Open Streets, visit
www.880cities.org/openstreets or www.openstreetsproject.org**

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