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CARACAS: Breaking Down the Invisible Barrier

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Introduction

Welcome to my hometown Caracas, today it holds a population of over 5 million inhabitants from which around 60% live on the “barrios” (slum areas) that surround the planned city. In the year 1940 we held a population of two-hundred and seventy thousand (270.000) inhabitants, which means that in a little over seventy years we have grown over twenty times.

Unable to keep up with the vast and fast growth the city had withstand these areas developed with an improvised infrastructure, poor mobility, low sanitary conditions and all other characteristics of slums areas around the world.

Lack of education has also taken its toll, deviating our youth into crime. High crime rates in fact hit a figure of over twenty-four thousand murders only in 2013. As if this wasn't enough our society has been facing a well known political conflict between government party supporters (Chavismo) and its opposition (Oposicion) for the past fifteen years. This has added new tensions to a population that was already divided by an evident class status.

So with a devastating picture in our hands: Is there hope for my city to re-conciliate its broken population and together find solutions to the many problems of today? More importantly can this be achieved or helped through urban planning and architecture?

Objectives:

First conducting a careful analysis of the situation of informal settlements, and identifying relevant and innovative programs focused in the improving of life conditions for its inhabitants, which permits to visualize effective paths to diminishing the social inequality affecting all cities in the region.

On second hand the investigation later develops into an urban proposal. This is composed of a series of strategies whose objective is the healing of urban spaces, and the provision of services while promoting community interaction and organization through participatory design.

Study Case:

Petare.- Located to the east of Caracas, Venezuela is the largest slum settlement on the capital, today home to over 1.2 million people. It is one of the clearest examples of urban tissue division between the formal and informal fabrics. The divisor line is constituted by the highway Francisco Fajardo that cuts through the east of the city. This represents a physical barrier that segregates the slums' population by separating it from the formal tissue. These physical characteristics of the place worsen problems of social character by relegating a part of the population to an improvised urban tissue without planned mobility or services, in general precarious life conditions.

