

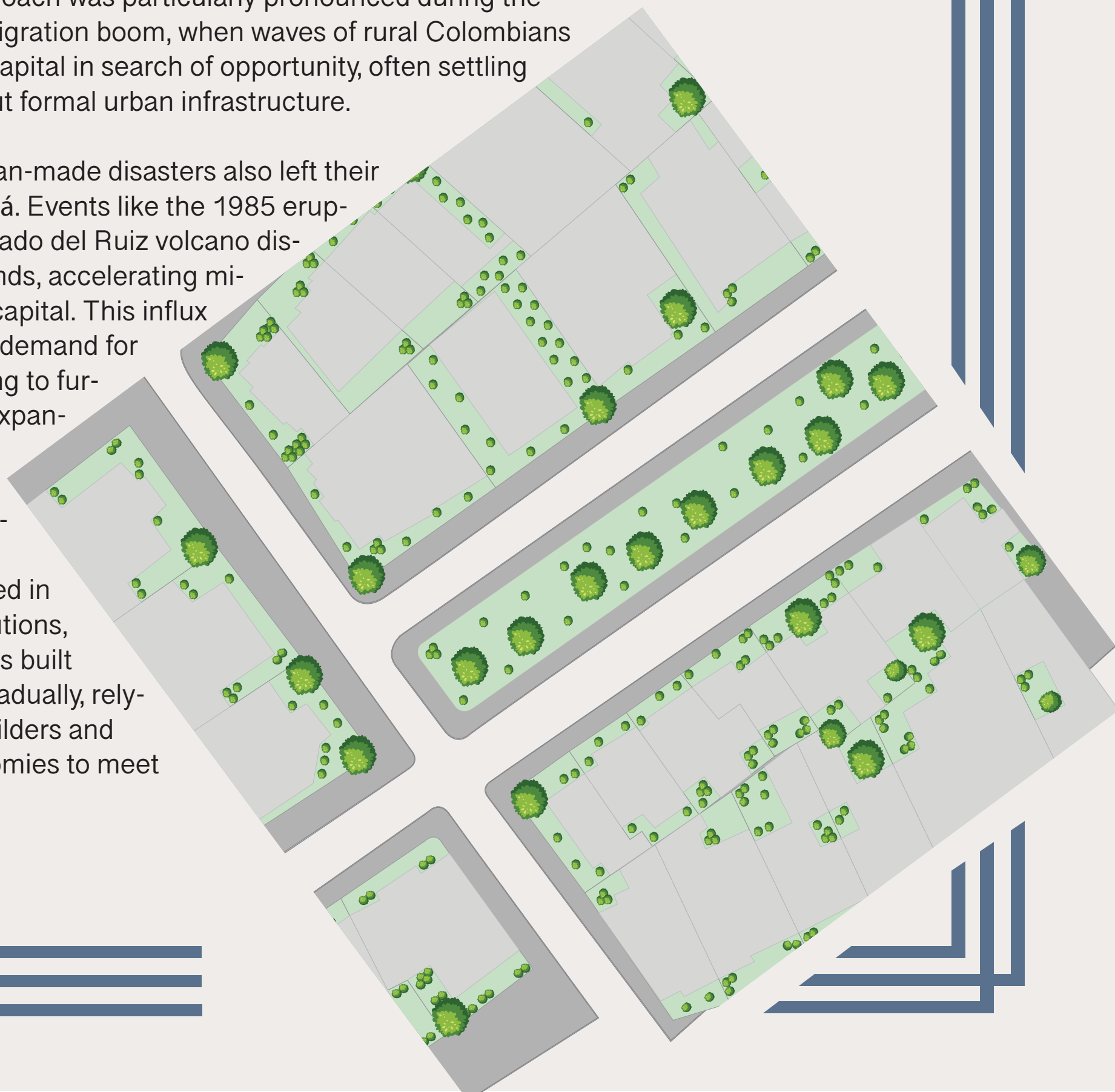
Spaces for Plants in Void Places

We also took walks—wandering not only through the green spaces of nearby parks but also paying closer attention to the vibrant plant life thriving in house gardens, along sidewalks, and in the small gaps between buildings. Bogotá, while surrounded by lush mountains and known for its high-altitude beauty, does not always boast extensive green spaces within the urban core when compared to some other global cities. Yet, as we explored its streets, we noticed how greenery finds a way to flourish in unexpected places—plants sprouting from cracks in the pavement, vines climbing walls, and flowers blooming in small private gardens. These fragmented patches of green, cultivated lovingly by individual residents, collectively create a unique urban ecosystem. Beyond official parks or green statistics, Bogotá reveals its own organic way of weaving nature into the city's vibrant tapestry. Let us explore how this scattered greenery shapes the city's character.

In the decades following the mid-20th century, Bogotá experienced a dramatic population surge, transforming it into one of the most populous cities in Latin America. Today, Bogotá is home to over 11 million residents, nearly 20 percent of Colombia's population, within a sprawling area of 1,775 square kilometers. This rapid growth has brought significant challenges, including housing shortages, economic inequality, and the expansion of informal settlements on the city's periphery.

Despite the pressures of urban density, Bogotá's development reflects a history of fragmented land ownership and decentralized planning. Much like Tokyo's reliance on individual landowners, Bogotá's growth has been shaped by self-built housing and informal construction. Starting in the 20th century, the city saw the establishment of working- and middle-class neighborhoods, with detached houses often built incrementally by families over time. This approach was particularly pronounced during the mid-century migration boom, when waves of rural Colombians moved to the capital in search of opportunity, often settling in areas without formal urban infrastructure.

Natural and man-made disasters also left their mark on Bogotá. Events like the 1985 eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano displaced thousands, accelerating migration to the capital. This influx intensified the demand for housing, leading to further informal expansion. The government's limited capacity to provide affordable housing resulted in piecemeal solutions, where residents built their homes gradually, relying on local builders and informal economies to meet their needs.



Economic shifts further influenced Bogotá's urban fabric. During Colombia's economic liberalization in the 1990s, rising land values and speculative real estate practices led to greater fragmentation of land ownership. This dynamic forced many families to sell portions of their properties, reshaping neighborhoods and driving vertical expansion in some areas while maintaining low-rise developments in others. The interplay of historical patterns, economic pressures, and social resilience has created a cityscape where formal and informal coexist, defining Bogotá as a metropolis of contrasts and adaptability.



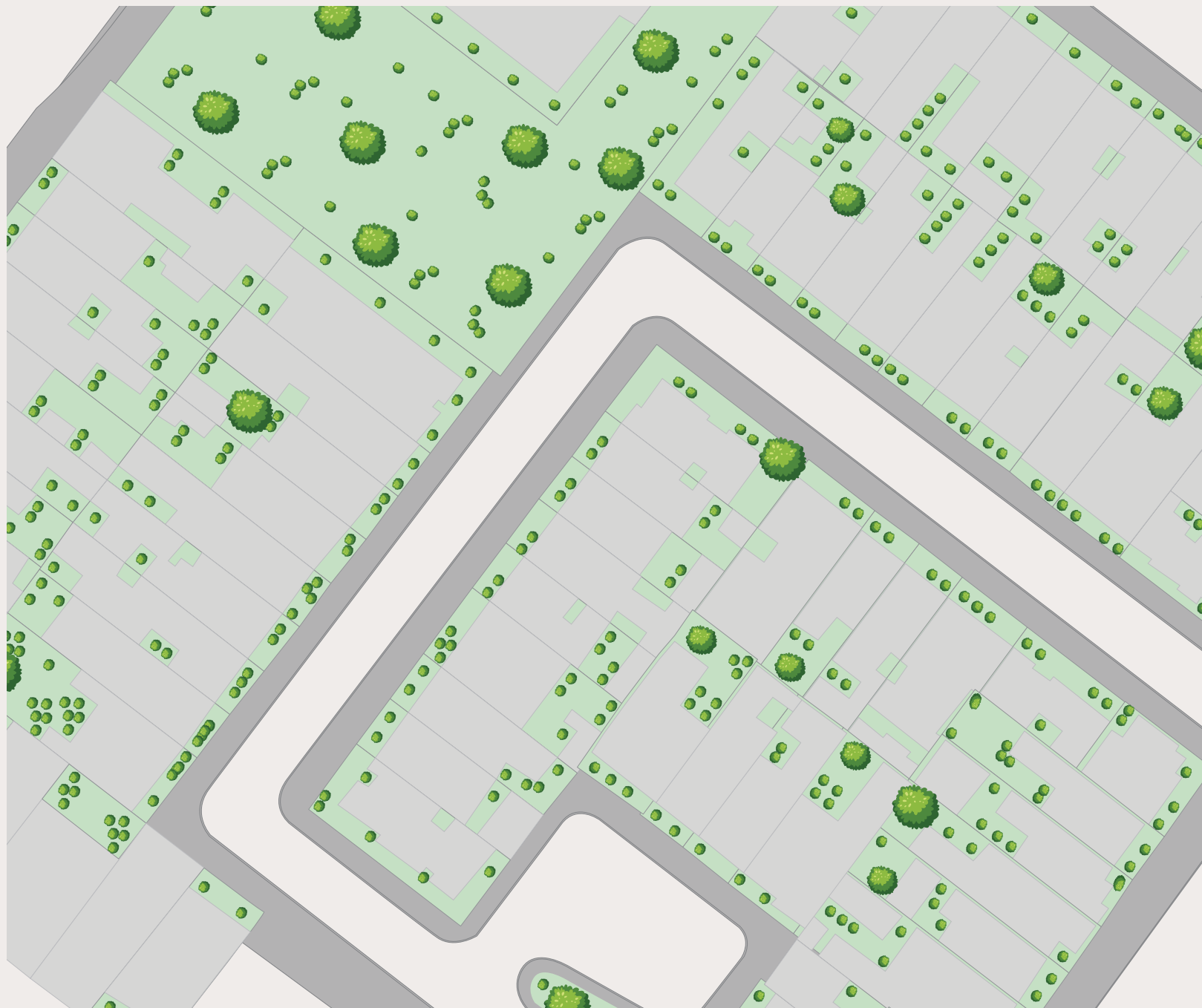
Gardens as Gifts

Many residential areas in Bogotá were once fertile farmland or forested hillsides before urbanization transformed the landscape in the 20th century. The Andean region's volcanic soil and abundant rainfall make it an ideal environment for plant growth. In Bogotá, greenery thrives wherever sunlight and water meet open ground, and residents often cultivate gardens using native or self-sown plants. These gardens, born from spontaneous vegetation, can remain simple or be shaped into imaginative, curated spaces that reflect their caretakers' creativity and values.

Unlike drier regions like Mexico City or Lima, where maintaining greenery often requires complex irrigation systems, Bogotá's climate allows gardens to flourish with minimal intervention. This accessibility has encouraged the presence of gardens in many homes, even in modest neighborhoods, creating small pockets of nature amid the bustling city. These green spaces are not merely decorative; they reflect Bogotá's unique interplay between its natural environment and urban life.

Plant Care and Urban Subsistence

In Bogotá, gardens often serve as more than aesthetic features—they support a form of urban minor subsistence. Residents grow herbs, fruit, and vegetables, integrating gardening into their daily lives as a practical and cultural practice. This tradition sustains a deeper connection to the land, even in an urban context, and highlights the resilience and resourcefulness of Bogotá's communities in cultivating life within the city's evolving landscape.



In Bogotá, second-generation homes often prioritize practicality, allocating void spaces along the street primarily for parking and pathways, with the remaining areas becoming gardens. These gardens, often open to public view, reflect the personality and preferences of their caretakers through the plants they cultivate.

Take, for example, a typical roadside garden facing east, where morning sunlight encourages diverse plant life. On one side, tall trees like guayacán or eucalyptus recall the natural landscapes of earlier generations, towering over shaded areas with ferns and mosses. On the other side, sun-loving plants such as heliconias or marigolds flourish, creating microclimates that coexist within a single space. Without walls or fences, these gardens offer a seamless connection to the street, extending their greenery into the public realm. They pose a compelling question: how can private green spaces transform public streets into shared ecological and social corridors?

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Works Cited

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