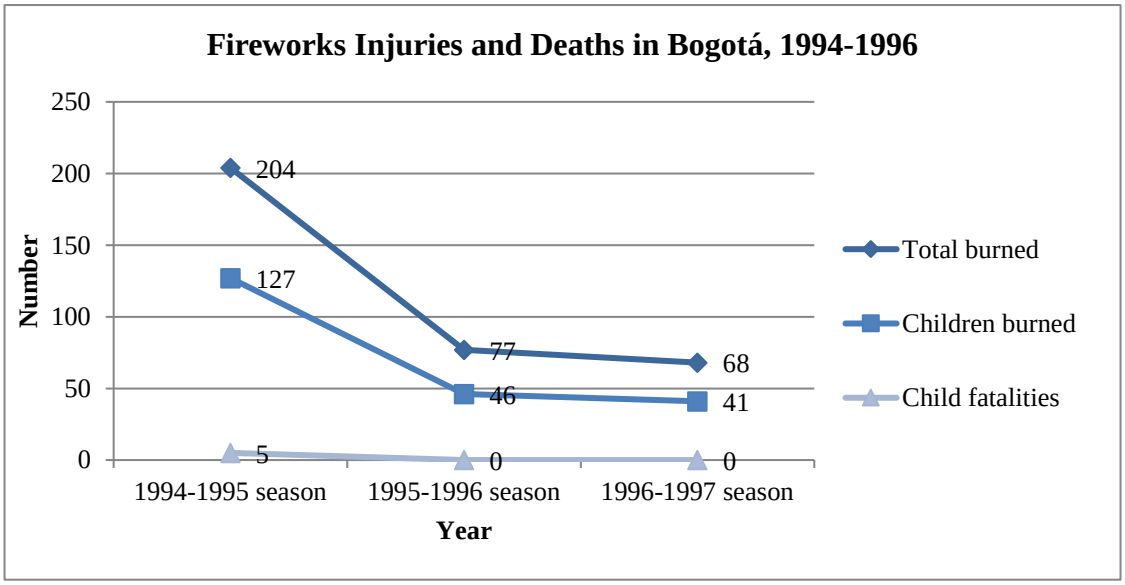
Antanas Mockus: The Prohibition of Fireworks in Bogotá Sequel

Results of Fireworks Prohibition

The decree prohibiting the use and sale of fireworks went into effect on December 10, 1995. Fireworks vendors protested actively, even bringing their own children to set off fireworks in front of City Hall. Though, on nights of celebration, the lights of fireworks could still be seen from the rooftops, most people followed the prohibition. Fireworks-related burns fell from 204 the previous season to 77 during the 1995-1996 Christmas season, a decline of approximately 62%.

Exhibit A: Fireworks Injuries and Death in Bogotá, 1994-1996[1]



This sequel was written by Inessa Lurye, HKS MPP 2012, for Archon Fung, Ford Foundation Professor of Democracy and Citizenship at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. HKS cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management. HKS791

For the Mockus administration, the fireworks decree showed that laws were not just a ritual response to Bogotá's problems – they could be written, well communicated, and enforced, despite some transgressions. Educating the public and cultivating a morale pressure linked to the image of the burned child helped the prohibition. In fact, "in light of the results, the citizens themselves had begun to call on the administration to implement these measures permanently."[2]

The prohibition continued during Mockus' first term. During the next Christmas season (1996-1997), to reinvigorate the public conversation about the ban, the administration composed a song that children sang around Bogotá. "My skin is protected, your moral consciousness is intact," rang their voices.

Many of the results, were also due to the decree's implementation of the creation of alternative substitutes for fireworks, negotiations with vendors, and public punishment for the decree's transgressors.

Substitutes for Fireworks

A few days after the decree, Mockus called a team of senior advisors and National University colleagues to his office to help brainstorm fireworks substitutes. He was interested in the relationship between danger and festivity and curious about safer ways to emulate the danger and excitement of exploding fireworks. Publicly, the administration promoted multiple alternatives, in the hopes that some ideas would resonate. There was seemingly little fear of failure.

Mockus suggested that the public blow on microphones at a particular angle, which would make a similar sound to fireworks. Instead of stuffing human shaped piñatas with fireworks, as was traditional in Colombia, Mockus suggested filling piñata with balloons that created a safer explosion. To promote this effort, Mockus painted his face and danced on the streets with a balloon stuffed piñata, an image broadcast on television.[3]

To reinforce the Carrot Christmas more broadly, the administration created "carrot kits" that were sold in some supermarket chains. These kits contained the type of humorous gadgets Mockus had suggested to the fireworks vendors – comical yet slightly edgy substitute products. Selected contents of the carrot kit included:

- *Condom* – for exploding. The condom was accompanied by instructions on how to explode it, in order to create sentiments of danger and excitement.
- *Plastic token* – for giving to the homeless. The token came from the philosophy that a big gift that could be given to the homeless is for common people, who usually fear them, to approach them.
- *Whistle* – for noisemaking. The whistle aimed to substitute the noise of fireworks.[4]

Negotiations with Vendors

Meanwhile, Mockus delegated the responsibility of negotiating with the fireworks vendors to Fernando Guzman, a lawyer who served as the Mayor's counsel (Private Secretary). The process for

establishing a clear procedure to compensate the firework merchants took almost a year and cost the city approximately $1 Million USD.

The inventory reporting that Mockus asked for on the night of December 8th was expanded, though there were worries that vendors – whose sales were not controlled or organized – would attempt to defraud the government. Guzman negotiated a tiered compensation system, where the government bought back stocks at 100% of market value for the smallest vendors and at lower rates as vendors increased in size. Moreover, the administration worked with the merchants on alternative job placements and provided them with vocational training. The effort helped a significant number of these seasonal workers to expand their skills.[5]

Punishment for Transgressors

Continuing the emphasis on education, the Mockus administration imposed public and "pedagogic sanctions" on those who transgressed the fireworks prohibition, such as parents who allowed their children to use fireworks. On December 29, 1995 it issued a clarification to the original fireworks decree, stating that the punishment for transgressors would be "work in the public interest…for the benefit of the community."[6] For the first time in recent Bogotá history, the Mayor had activated the sanction of community service.

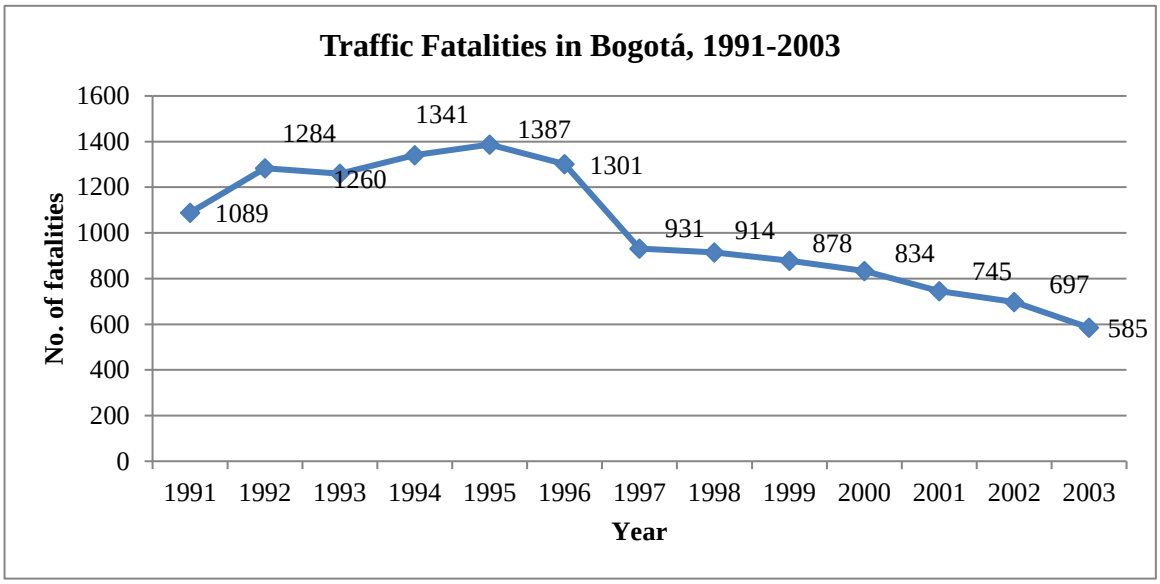
Then on December 31st, a traditional day of merriment, government officials picked up transgressors from around the City. Aware that the Colombian Constitution prohibited humiliating punishment, Mockus, the Chief of Police, and the Secretary of Government joined the transgressors in their punishment – cleaning the Plaza de Bolivar (a large, public square).[7] Additional sanctions, such as cleaning the city's prison served as a public reminder aimed to encourage compliance with the decree.

Additional Results of the Carrot Christmas

The Carrot Law, restricting alcohol sales, went into effect on December 29, 1995. It was followed by a month of nightly monitoring of bars by senior administration officials, who were frequently accompanied by the media.[8] As citizen behavior changed, the high-profile monitoring decreased. Self and peer regulation increased and adherence to the law improved as the media presented the positive results. For example, relative to the 1994 Christmas season, during the Carrot Christmas "violent events were reduced by half: 11 dead, 32 wounded and no [home or vehicle] robberies."[9]

Moreover, it is likely, that the use of mimes to control traffic and the enforcement of the Carrot Law contributed to the decrease in traffic accidents, which fell from 1,387 in 1995 to 931 in 1997.

Exhibit B: Traffic Fatalities in Bogotá, 1991-2003[10]



Notes

[1] Alicia Silva, *Bogotá, from Construction to Decay 1995-2007*, Trans. 1998, Bogotá, p. 35.

[2] *Cambio Magazine,* January 1996, Issues 135-138.

[3] Antanas Mockus. Personal Interview. 17 August 2011.

[4] Antanas Mockus. Personal Interview. 17 August 2011.

[5] Fernando Guzman. Personal Interview. 18 August 2011.

[6] Mayor of Santa Fe De Bogota, D.C. *Act 905 of 1995,* Bogota: District Registry 1078, December 29, 1995.

[7] Antanas Mockus. Personal Interview. 17 August 2011.

[8] Hugo Acero. Personal Interview. 10 August 2011.

[9] Alicia Silva, *Bogotá, from Construction to Decay 1995-2007,* Trans. 1998, Bogotá, p. 35.

[10] Antanas Mockus, *Articulo* Logoros, Trans., Bogotá, p. 4.