

Shortly after, he joined the Congress for the Republic, the party of the transition President, Moncef Marzouki. And his political career began in earnest.

The seeds of disillusionment

But Nabil's enthusiasm for Tunisia's new future was soon tainted.

After a few weeks, he started to see opposition parties vie for power. The new Government started to include former ministers from the old regime.

"My dream turned into frustration. You can't go through regime change if you let the same people back into power. I felt like the democratic transition had started to slip".

After six months, Nabil quit his political party. Its values, he feels, did not represent him. And he was disappointed by what he saw as a focus on marketing rather than defending democratic principles.

Far from deterring him from politics, Nabil's experience only served to spur him on. In early 2013, he joined a group of about 100 people to launch a new political party: Democratic Current (Attayar).

To Nabil, the party was an attempt to bring new values to the political party scene in Tunisia. He wanted to present voters with a new choice, a social democratic party based on the values of honesty and independence from financial lobby.

THE TUNIS SCHOOL OF POLITICS

A LIFELONG CONNECTION



Before 2011, Nabil Hajji had never been involved in politics.

But the Jasmine Revolution changed that. Following the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime, he saw his fellow Tunisians start to dream. They dreamed of a better country; a democratic country with social justice.

His belief in this dream led him to become an election observer in the 2011 elections, Tunisia's first free and fair elections since the country's independence in 1956.

"To finally have successful elections, we had to try to create a new experience. I still remember the queues outside the polling booths. People stood in line for 4-5 hours to vote. I wanted to be part of this celebration of democracy."



The Tunis School of Politics

In 2015, Nabil first took part in the Tunis School of Politics (TSoP). TSoP is a platform for young politicians, run by our long-term partner in Tunisia, the [Centre des Études Méditerranéennes et Internationales](#) (CEMI), with support from NIMD and [Demo Finland](#).

The school was set up in 2012 as space for politicians to work together in a multiparty setting. Politicians can learn skills and knowledge to help them in their political careers. By learning together across party lines, the participants get to know and trust each other.

Nabil did not know much about TSoP when he decided to participate. But he was immediately impressed by the multiparty setting.

"We felt like a unified group rather than a set of individual students, because all the major parties were represented. Working together allowed us to connect on a human level, despite our political differences."

Nabil also found the practical skills training provided by TSoP very beneficial. He enjoyed the quality of the training on debating techniques, media, and political communication, among other topics.

This was particularly valuable for Nabil, who campaigned in the 2019 parliamentary elections. He feels that the training on media and political communication helped him to communicate his political views and connect with voters during the campaign. And his ability to talk to the media continues to help him even now in his career.

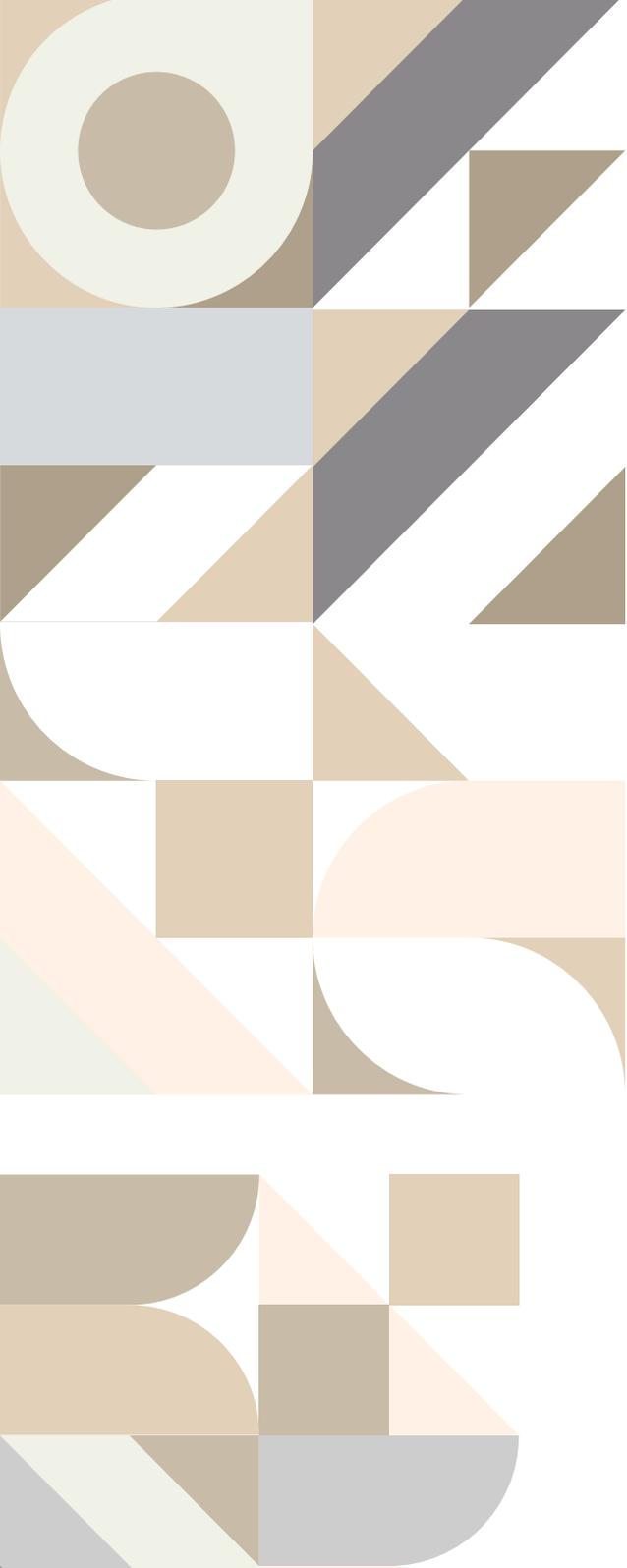
Based on his newly improved campaigning skills, and the high esteem his party held him in, Nabil was one of 53 TSoP alumni to be elected to parliament.

The Parliamentary Academy

TSoP's commitment to Nabil's development and democratic values did not come to an end once he took up his parliamentary seat.

CEMI also provides ongoing practical support to TSoP alumni, and promotes cooperation across party lines, through a Parliamentary Academy.

Nabil explains that the Academy helps to set a constructive tone for heated debates. Within Parliament, these debates can be fueled by partisan conflicts and rivalries. But, in the context of the Academy, the MPs are more relaxed and the dialogue is more constructive. Together, the MPs can put aside traditional rivalries and work on joint solutions.



The Parliamentary Academy also provides space for exploratory discussions on key areas of debate in Tunisia. For example, the participants have discussed Tunisia's fragmented parliamentary landscape and issues with the current electoral law. These explorations have led Nabil's party to start drawing up a proposal for electoral reforms.

In some cases, CEMI also provides parliamentary aides and technical experts to help parties to draft bills. Nabil has appreciated this support, especially on his party's recent bill on opinion surveys.

An ongoing commitment

Even six years after his first training, Nabil still considers himself part of TSoP.

As well as the Parliamentary Academy, his relationship with TSoP has continued through regular *couscous politiques* - where TSoP alumni from all political parties continue to meet and informally discuss political issues over a traditional dinner.

For Nabil, the connections he has been able to make through TSoP, and maintain through the *couscous politiques* and Parliamentary Academy, are invaluable to his political career.

Very recently, for example, a friend he had made through TSoP, who works in a minister's office, acted as an intermediary to help Nabil with a project he was working on. He could count on her help, even though she is part of a competing party.

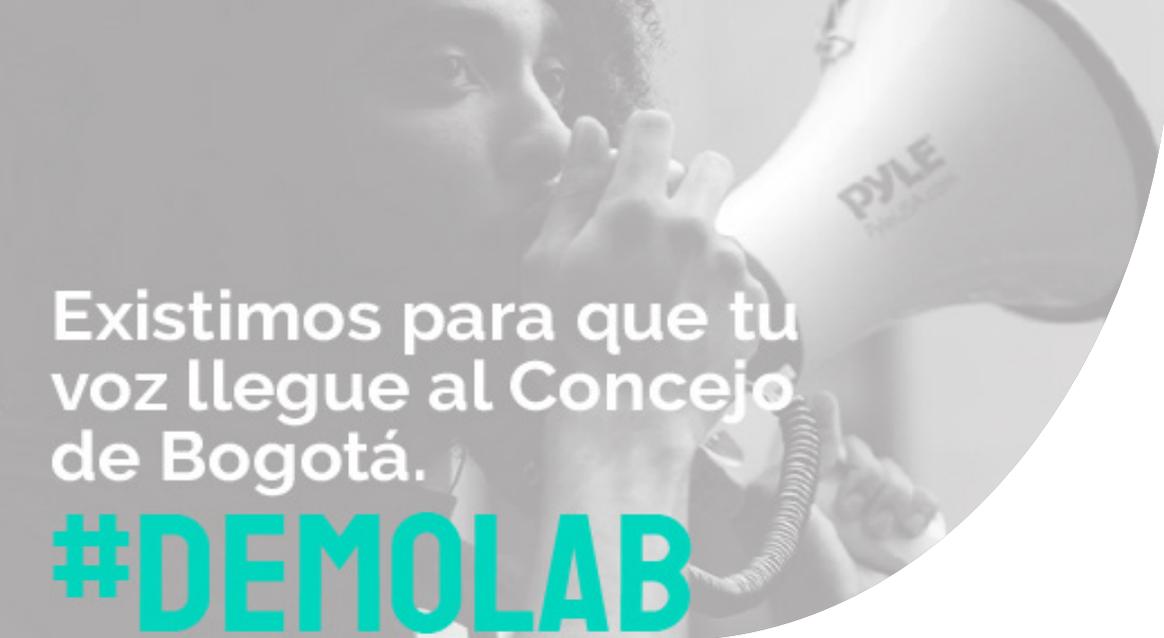
"If the trust is there, then the human connection we made through TSoP helps to overcome partisan conflicts and to streamline our work."

As one of the TSoP participants elected in 2019, Nabil is now part of a network of TSoP alumni in Parliament, who share trust and a deep belief in democratic values.

According to Nabil: *"Trust overcomes obstacles. TSoP is more than a training programme. It's a family."*

And TSoP continues to promote sustained trust-based relationships among its network of alumni. From their first contact with TSoP, to relying on an important sparring partner as established MPs, TSoP alumni can count on the school for ongoing support.

CEMI, NIMD and Demo Finland hope to continue to contribute to a more inclusive democracy in Tunisia – one where political actors from different parties can work effectively together and for the good of Tunisia's people, through their mutual relationship of trust.



Existimos para que tu voz llegue al Concejo de Bogotá.

#DEMOLAB

"#DEMOLAB: We exist so that your voice can reach Bogota Council."

DEMOLAB

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN COLOMBIA

At NIMD, we believe firmly that a true democracy is one where the voices of all people can be heard loud and clear. It is one where voters know how to connect with their political representatives; where politicians listen to their needs and concerns; and where there can be an open dialogue between them.

Based on these values, we have kicked off a new project with the City Council of Bogota, the capital of Colombia. This project, entitled DemoLab, is a whole set of innovative practices, strategies and actions that the council has adopted in order to increase its transparency and involve citizens in policymaking.

It's about creating a dialogue between the population and their elected representatives, and making sure this dialogue is built on respect, openness and mutual listening.

The DemoLab initiative came from Bogota Council itself, who saw a clear need to strengthen trust in the institution among the general public. With support from NIMD, EXTITUTO, the *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung en Colombia* (FESCOL), *Fundación Avina* and *Diseño Público*, they set up the first political innovation laboratory for an elected institution in Colombia.

We spoke to two participants of DemoLab, to understand their stories, and how the project has affected them.

Alejandro Daly

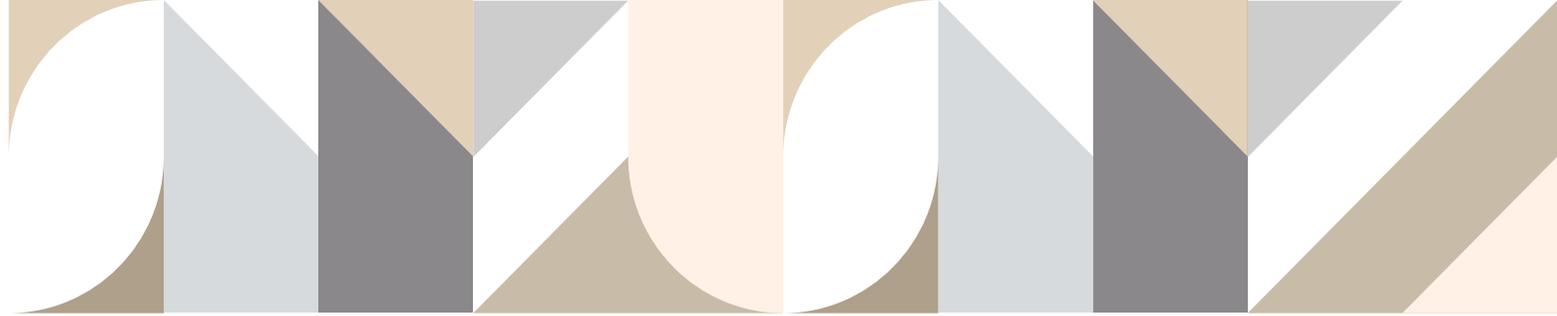
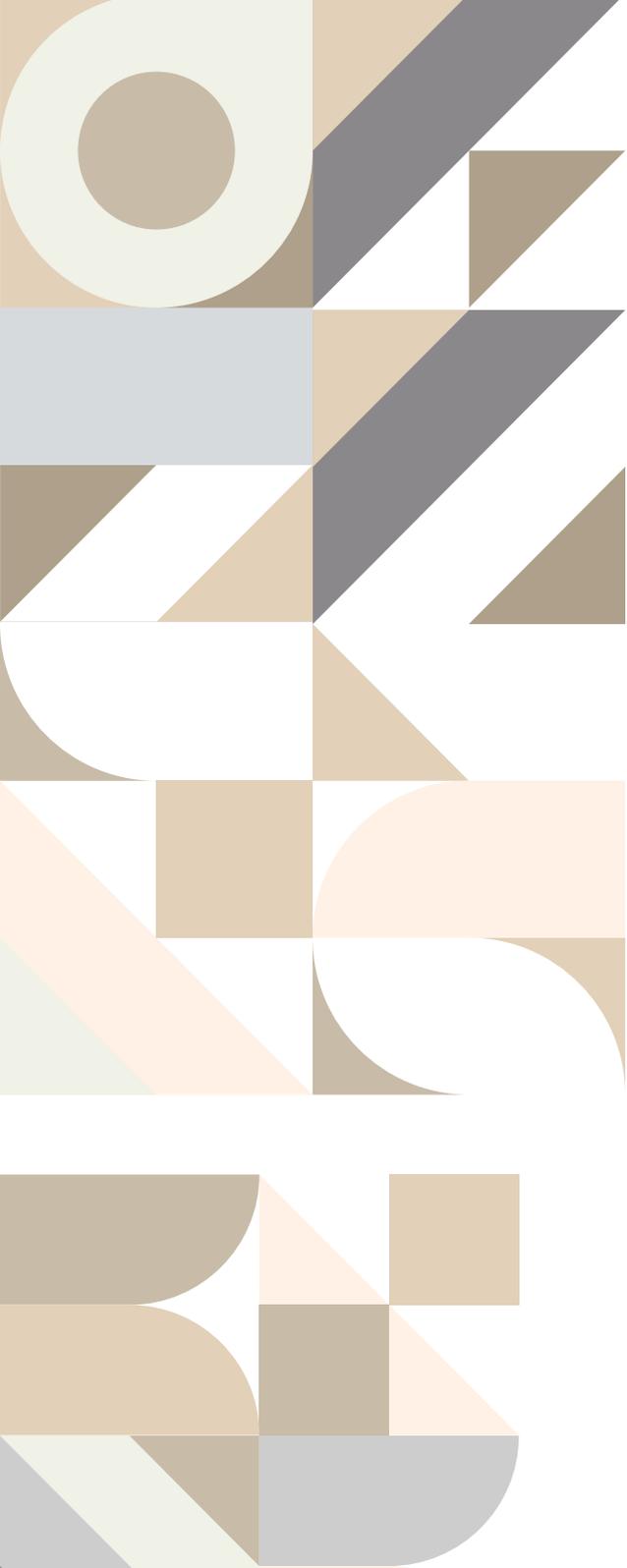
Alejandro Daly believes strongly that citizen participation can make a difference. In particular, he is dedicated to increasing the political participation of the migrant population in decision-making processes.

As a Venezuelan, who migrated to Colombia only months before the start of Venezuela's crisis in 2014, he has seen first-hand the barriers that many migrants can face. He has also seen how the timing of his arrival in Colombia afforded him different opportunities and better living conditions than many of his fellow Venezuelans.

Alejandro heads a social movement - *El Derecho a no Obedecer* - which drives young people's participation in politics and fights for the rights of migrants in Colombia.

First contact with DemoLab

Alejandro took part in an exercise which aimed to open a dialogue between Councillors and Bogota's citizens. By answering structured questions and discussing important issues together, the participants gave feedback to the Councillors on the city's proposed Local Development Plan. The idea was to come up with concrete proposals and provide valuable input which the Councillors would use to amend the Plan.



Reaching the public through WhatsApp

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, NIMD and our partners had to come up with a virtual way to bring this group together. The session was therefore run through WhatsApp, an easy and accessible way to reach as many people as possible within Bogota.

Alejandro recalls that the participants were each assigned a WhatsApp group, could talk directly with a Councillor.

To structure the exercise, they all received pre-recorded videos on different topics, ranging from the need to cut down trees to provide public transport stations, to how to prioritize support during COVID-19. The participants then discussed their ideas and concerns about these topics. The emphasis was on free conversation, creating a connection between the different people in the group, and making sure everyone felt comfortable to make their ideas heard.

"For me it was very impressive. Managing to make so many voices heard in an innovative laboratory for citizen participation, with so much direct contact and support from the Councillor. We were really given the tools to participate and build together."

A diverse group

The main thing that struck Alejandro was the diversity of the participants. They came from different socioeconomic backgrounds and different professions.

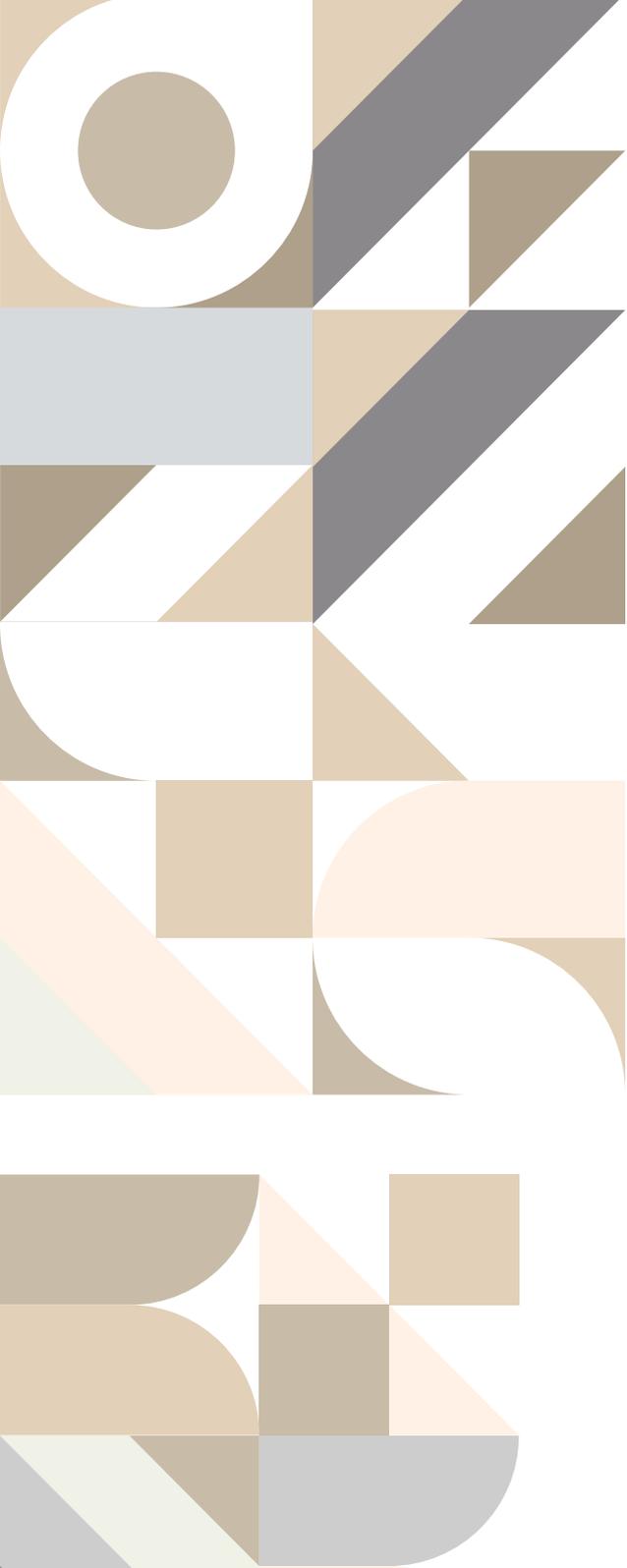
But, what's more, each member of the WhatsApp group had different ideas and priorities. It felt to Alejandro that everyone had their own cause and saw the platform as a space to make their voices heard.

He was happy to join them, flying the flag for the rights of migrants in Venezuela. And he felt listened to and valued, because he had direct access to a Councillor.

But the quantity of different opinions and causes did not derail the conversation. Instead, Alejandro remembers a relaxed and open atmosphere, where everyone felt comfortable to express their view, and listened with respect to the other participants.

"I really loved the open structure. It was so interesting to hear the different voices and opinions in the WhatsApp group."

To him, that is the essence of democracy: *"Hearing different voices, and reaching consensus, even when opinions vary, even when there are disagreements. Democratic systems allow many ways to do this, but the outcome is always the same. And people can always make themselves heard."*



Julian Rodriguez

Like Alejandro, Julian Rodriguez is also a great believer in inclusive democracy, which he describes as:

"A construction of a social fabric based both on differences and what brings us together."

A strong advocate of political participation among young people, he spent many years working on local projects as a youth ambassador with the UN.

In this role, Julian saw the barriers which confront a lot of young people in his country, and the inequality which often hinders political participation.

This realization motivated him to run for Councillor. To him, his role in Bogota Council is a public duty. He is dedicated to representing young people and finding initiatives that solve the problems they face.

Participating in DemoLab

As a Councillor, Julian was happy to be able to participate in a virtual DemoLab activity, designed to equip citizens with knowledge about the Local Development Plan and gather their feedback.

Through the online activity, Julian met with a group of citizens, and presented some of the articles and proposals in the Development Plan.

Levelling the playing field

For Julian, the main challenge was to make the information accessible. The information within the Plan could be considered technical, but this exercise gave him the opportunity to make it digestible, and bring it to life.

He was surprised at the results. The citizens were frank and calm when discussing the issues. They did not romanticize the relationship between politicians and the public. Instead, it felt like everyone was on the same playing field working towards the same goal: to produce a final plan that met the needs of the population.

"The citizens were in the position of power, the way it should be in democracy. We always think the politician is on top but it's actually the contrary. Politicians serve the public, and the public must interact and articulate their concerns and ideas."

Taking the process further

Julian found it inspiring to build this connection with citizens, and see them speak out to the councillors, holding them to account.

He hopes that the participants will take forward experience, and realize that their democratic impact can go further than voting. Perhaps, he says, some will become more involved in politics as a result.

But the impact on Julian himself has also been strong. By seeing how the exercise corresponded to local needs in a complex time, he also became convinced that such dialogue must be made more permanent.

"It's not a one-off. Democracy means constant and permanent dialogue. Constructive and critical, which continues to put forward real proposals on the implementation and follow up of the development plan."

Julian has taken the responsibility seriously, making efforts to continue reaching out to communities virtually to gather feedback and opinions.

"Agendas are built by listening to people, understanding their needs – we have continued to do this virtually (learning from DemoLab) and on the ground."

So, for Julian, the main impact has been the chance to build a more permanent dialogue. DemoLab provided the first tools and online resources to make it possible to meet with citizens.

"It has allowed us to hear from people from different areas, groups, backgrounds, and ideologies. It confronted us with their different viewpoints, and inspired us to take the connection further."

A more inclusive society

Through initiatives such as the DemoLab, NIMD Colombia strives for a more inclusive society, where people have the tools and opportunities they need to become involved in politics. And where politicians are held to account by the people around them.

Across many of our programmes, like in Colombia, we are helping politicians to find new ways to connect with their voters, and with their populations at large, and enter into a dialogue with them.



"We are a space to make Bogota a more open and democratic city."