Edgelands 2021-2026

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Introduction

Cities are no longer just physical spaces; they are increasingly defined by invisible layers of data, algorithms, and surveillance technologies. From facial recognition cameras in public squares, to AI-driven risk assessments in schools, urban security tools are being deployed at a pace that exceeds our collective ability to understand them effectively.

Despite people being best placed to understand their own safety and the trade-offs they are willing to make, this rapid global rise in digital security measures has advanced with little public conversation about their implementation and impact on individuals and communities.
With this in mind, the Edgelands Institute sought to create spaces where people could reflect on how digital technologies are reshaping their daily lives and relationships, and the trade-offs they are asked to make in the name of security.

Rather than establishing a permanent institution, which can become rigid and bureaucratic, we chose to exist as a temporary, high-energy force. From its foundation, Edgelands was deliberately structured in its statutes to operate for a period of five years (2021–2026). As a transdisciplinary institute, it blended academic research, citizen participation, and artistic intervention within defined timeframes. During these years, we witnessed firsthand how the urgency of the “pop-up” can foster a unique environment for dialogue, bringing together diverse stakeholders to discuss difficult and technical aspects of security and technology.

This final report outlines the results of our methodology in practice across five diverse cities: Medellín, Cúcuta, Geneva, Nairobi, and Houston.

It shows that, despite the vast differences in contexts such as border migration, constitutional rights, and historical racial oppression, the need to renegotiate the rules and norms that define how we live together is universal. Perhaps more importantly, it shows that a temporary presence can have a lasting impact, proving that the future of our cities depends not on technological progress, but on the depth of our conversations.

Report Structure

- **Our Methodology in Practice:** A deep dive into the three-phase cycle (Framing, Popping-Up, Popping-Down) used in every city.
- **Key Insights:** Three main lessons learned across the five-year journey regarding art, temporality, and context.
- **The Toolkit:** A curated list of tangible resources, reports, and digital assets produced during this period.
- **Conclusion – Beyond the Pop-Up:** A reflection on the Institute's lasting impact and an invitation for others to continue the conversation.

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Our Methodology in practice

The Edgelands methodology is defined by the curation of spaces that bring together academic research, citizen participation, and art. Each of these activities was carried out within a strict timeframe, with the outcomes of one activity informing and shaping the themes of the next. This transdisciplinary approach helped us to break down traditional barriers to knowledge.

Beyond our physical interventions, we extended this model through two cohorts of global fellows and a series of online events. These programs aimed to connect individuals from different knowledge sectors, encouraging conversations that integrated diverse perspectives, and building a network of individuals (experts and non-experts alike) exploring the digitalization of security and our collective ability to coexist.

Within our city operations, this methodology functioned as a cyclical process. We established temporary residences in select locations, where on-site teams facilitated discussions about the digitalization of security and its effect on the urban social contract, ultimately concluding with a purposeful “pop-down.” In every city, this cycle was structured into three distinct phases: Framing, Popping Up, and Popping Down.

Phase 1: Framing the Discussion

This first phase typically lasted three months and was designed to understand the key issues in the city around security and digital technology from the perspective of the city residents. We arrived with questions, not answers. Our aim was to understand how the “urban social contract” was functioning—or failing—in practice, and how the conversation around security and technology was evolving in each city.

The phase comprised a thorough review of policies and reports on local security practices and a series of 20–40 semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of individuals. We combined the perspectives of traditional experts on issues such as security, cybersecurity, migration, and youth

with those of people with direct lived experience. These dialogues revealed distinct local concerns at the intersection of security and technology. For example:

- In Medellín, interviews revealed a heavy reliance on digital tools to address issues of insecurity in the city.
- In Cúcuta, interviews shed light on the symbiosis between Venezuela and Colombia and the influence of the border dynamic on the city's security.
- In Geneva, conversations revealed a sense of security in physical spaces, in contrast to anxiety and concerns about security in the digital realm.
- In Nairobi, research traced the lineage from colonial-era kipande identification systems to modern biometrics.
- In Houston, we investigated how the use of digital technologies in public schools risked reinforcing the existing social inequalities, with a disproportionate impact on Black and Latin American communities.

The Output: These two components were compiled into City-Specific Diagnostic Reports. These documents formed the basis of our ongoing work in the city and provided a starting point for further conversations.

Phase 2: Popping-Up

Once the groundwork had been completed, we moved into the core of the Pop-Up: a period of intense, interdisciplinary activity lasting between five and seven months.

This phase was designed to curate structured yet flexible spaces that would facilitate dialogue between the general public and experts, to support educational efforts, identify solutions, and embrace the complexity of the issue through the arts, while also envisaging alternatives. In partnership with local organizations, we hosted these spaces to en-

sure that local stakeholders would shape the terms and outcomes of these discussions.

The primary goal of this phase was to stimulate informed conversations about the digitalization of security in the city—topics which are often perceived as overly technical, complex, or politically charged. Some of the spaces we hosted are the following:

- **Research Sprints:** Across Medellín, Cúcuta, Geneva, and Nairobi, these programs engaged a total of over 110 participants from backgrounds in law, sociology and the arts. Working alongside a network of 56 national and international experts and 15 mentors, these participants completed an eight-week program combining expert conversations with guided research. The outcome was a series of podcast epi sodes exploring security from a variety of angles.

- **Edgelands Maps Workshops:** In Medellín, Cúcuta, and Geneva, a total of over 70 young people engaged in workshops to discuss their personal experiences and perceptions of safety in physical and digital spaces.

- **Participatory Data Workshops:** These workshops were de signed to invite citizens and experts to engage throughout the lifecycle of security and surveillance data in their cities.

- The “Decoding Security” project in Medellín brought to gether 20 researchers and seven experts to analyze and visualize open data on surveillance.

- In Geneva, the “Dropping the Pin” initiative encouraged residents to photograph and geolocate cameras. Over the course of seven weeks, we collected 348 photos and successfully identified an additional 423 cameras, resulting in the creation of a crowdsourced map of surveillance infrastructure.

- **Artistic Interventions:** Recognizing the importance of art and its key role in research and raising awareness of complex social issues, we curated different spaces to explore and understand the specific realities of security and technology intersections in each city. Our aim was to raise awareness of these issues and facilitate conversation.

  - Magnum x Edgelands: In Medellín, Nairobi, Geneva, and Houston, Magnum photographers worked closely with Edgelands researchers, grassroots organizations, and cultural institutions to conduct their own research on the ground and visually interpret the findings in the Edgelands’ diagnostic reports on each city. They also hosted workshops on visual narrative and documentary photography with local photographers.

  - MATZA x Edgelands: Across Medellín, Cúcuta, Nairobi, and Geneva, MATZA created spaces for collaborative creation involving a total of 32 local and international artists. During a two-week period in each city, these artists reflected on new forms of the social contract alongside experts, citizens, and activists.

- Two major art residencies:

  - The “Glitch Lab” in Houston brought together three local artists to explore the intersection between surveillance, education, and youth justice.

- The “Exploring Digital Spaces and How Another Urban Social Contract is Possible Through Art” residency invited four international artists to engage with the Edgelands research project and translate its questions and findings into artistic outputs.

- **Public Forums:** In collaboration with local organizations, we hosted over 15 spaces for conversation between residents, local experts, and decision-makers. These events provided a platform for knowledge sharing, offering participants the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics and complexities of their cities, as well as emerging local trends in surveillance, urban planning strategies for security and innovative solutions. Examples of these events included the “Hablemos Medellín” forums, the “Border, Security and Surveillance” panel in Cúcuta, and the “Débat : L’Intégrité Numérique et la Sécurité» in Geneva.

The Output: This phase generated a surge of local energy. Beyond raising awareness, the outcome was a dynamic network of advocates, a variety of creative outputs and a group of well-informed citizens who were keen to ask relevant questions.

Phase 3: Popping-Down

After completing the planned series of activities in each city, the Institute would “pop down” from that location.
The purpose of “popping down” was to encourage residents, in their various roles as community members, professionals, academics, and policy-makers, to continue exploring and building on the themes and conversations introduced during the Institute’s time there.

As part of this process, we reflected on all the lessons learned in each city and incorporated them into the next pop-up location. This ensured a connection between the cities and continuity between each pop-up.

Tangible Deliverables: Each city pop-up concluded with two core material outputs, which were designed to codify our findings for future use. A

synthesis report that compiled key reflections and recommendations for the city, and a public closing event where stakeholders reviewed the journey, celebrated achievements, and opened new questions, continuing the conversation.

Signs of Sustained Impact: Beyond these formal deliverables, the measure of our success lay in how the work continued independently after we left the city. We observed several enduring impacts, indicating that the conversations had taken root:

- Some participants chose to pursue Master's or PhDs, conducting advanced research on topics directly related to Edgelands" work.

- Collaborating artists found new angles and directions for their practice, inspired by our joint investigations.

- Existing networks of local actors continued to collaborate on security and technology issues without external facilitation.

- New cross-border partnerships formed organically from the connections established during our dialogues.

These indicators exemplify the benefits of the methodology in establishing a self-sustaining ecosystem of enquiry that transcends the lifespan of the temporary institution itself.

TEAM 1
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Ariane
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Santiago
Vanessa
Javier
Sabina
Sara
Bernard
TEAM 4
Yael
Betsy
Pilar
Dario
Guzzo
Brunni
Caty
TEAM 5
Pascal
Philipp
Ben
Alexandre
Laura
Alex
Juan R

localhost
HOW TO USE
Point at a node to highlight it
Linger 2 seconds to open details
Open palm to drag the network around
Two open hands spread or bring together to zoom in / out
Your hands glow in the same color as the active gesture.
Sara Arango-Franco
Medellín
Art Data science and/or data analysis, Data visualization, Technology and Social
Edgelands x Magnum
2021–2025

Insights

For five years, we applied the same three-phase methodology—Framing, Popping Up, and Popping Down—in five very different cities. We were struck not only by the success of individual projects, but also by the similarities that emerged across them.

Whether we were conducting diagnostic interviews in Medellín that revealed a heavy reliance on digital tools, crowdsourcing surveillance maps in Geneva, or convening cross-border dialogues between Colombian and Venezuelan stakeholders in Cúcuta, the same dynamics kept surfacing. We observed this pattern again when young researchers in Nairobi transformed their findings into formal contributions for United Nations civil society sessions, while their counterparts in Houston employed similar participatory research methods to advocate for policy changes.

Running this cycle repeatedly provided consistent insights into effective ways of bringing people together to discuss the digitalization of security and its impact on our lives. Below are the three main insights.

1. Data Needs Art to Land

One of our most significant insights was that technical analysis alone is ineffective in mobilizing citizens. Surveillance data, such as statistics on camera counts or algorithmic risks, remains abstract until it is made visible and tangible. We found that artistic intervention is not just illustrative, but essential for engagement.

- **The Insight:** Visual storytelling creates an emotional connection that policy papers cannot.

- **Evidence from Edgelands Projects:** In Geneva, photographer Thomas Dworzak (via our Magnum Photos partnership) documented citizens' invisible digital footprints. By sending participants a "postcard" from the location where their "digital double" physically resides, he made the abstract concept of data tangible and personal.

- **Evidence from Local Observation:** In Medellín, we observed hundreds of representations of the Virgin Mary installed alongside surveillance cameras throughout the metro system. This “divine gaze”—created organically by the community, not Edgelands—illustrates how existing cultural symbols compete with technological surveillance in the public imagination.

These two cases demonstrate that art can change how people experience being watched, whether through intentional intervention or pre-existing symbolism.

2. The Power of Temporality: Urgency Creates Energy

Our “pop-up” model proved that a temporary presence can drive change. Designed to exist for only four to five years, the defined end date of the institute (and its individual projects) generated a unique energy that helped break down the barriers often encountered in traditional academic and policymaking circles.

- **The Insight:** A compressed timeframe encourages stakeholders to engage in important discussions now rather than deferring them.

- **Evidence:** Our methodology allowed us to bring together diverse stakeholders, from government employees to artists, in short, high-intensity bursts across all cities (e.g., the three-week MATZA Art Residencies and nine-week Data Analysis Workshops). This produced concrete outputs such as policy recommendations and workshops that are available for public replication.

3. Context Matters: One Method, Many Realities

Although our methodology remained consistent, it had to be adapted to fit the local socio-political context. What worked for a constitutional debate in Geneva could not simply be transferred to debates about border relations in Cúcuta or discussions about how the city government uses digital technologies in Medellín.

- **The Insight:** When it comes to creating spaces for inclusive conversations, there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution; success depends on reading the room and adapting the focus to local history and urgent needs.

- **Evidence:** In Geneva, our work focused on digital rights, leading to a 98% vote in favour of Digital Integrity. By contrast, Cúcuta focused on border control and migration dynamics, and Medellín examined the integration of digital tools into public policy in a post-conflict context. Similarly, Nairobi addressed historical inequalities linked to colonial identification systems, while Houston prioritized school safety and racial equity. The key to success was tailoring the dialogue to local priorities rather than imposing a uniform agenda.

Synthesis

Ultimately, the Edgelands experiment showed that renegotiating the urban social contract requires a dual approach: rigorous local adaptation alongside universal values of participation and transparency. As Insights 1 and 2 demonstrate, this necessitates the emotional power of art and the immediacy of temporary engagement. As Insight 3 shows, fidelity to the local context is also demanded.

We learned that citizens are willing to engage with complex technological issues if the topic is simplified without being reductive, the process is inclusive, and the conversation is accessible and engaging. By bringing together different perspectives, disciplines, and methods, we created spaces where new possibilities emerged. These insights form the basis of the toolkit that we are leaving behind for anyone who is interested in continuing the conversation.

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Toolkit

Over the course of five years, we produced a wide range of deliverables, including reports, art exhibitions, and practical digital tools. These resources will remain available in a public archive at edgelands.institute for curious citizens, policymakers, researchers, artists, and community leaders to access.

All of the materials listed below are available to download, adapt, and reuse. We encourage users to:

- Download the reports and toolkits from our public archive.
- Adapt the methodologies (from our Pop-up methodology to the particular programs such as Research Sprints, Data Interventions, and Edgelands Maps Workshops) to fit local and cultural contexts.
- Share your own adaptations with our network!

1. Diagnostic & Thematic Reports

We produced comprehensive diagnostic reports for each city, providing a baseline of local realities which were often undocumented. In partnership with various researchers, we also developed thematic reports to help understand and evaluate technology governance.

City-Specific Diagnostics

- "Medellín: A Diagnostic Report on Urban Security, Surveillance and Challenges to the Urban Social Contract": https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/diag-reports/medellin-diag.html

- "Cúcuta: The Borders of the Urban Social Contract": https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/diag-reports/cucuta-diag.html

- "Geneva: A City of Paradoxes and Dualities": https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/diag-reports/geneva-diag.html

- "Nairobi Diagnostic Report": https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/diag-reports/nairobi-diag.html

- "Houston Youth Surveillance Report": https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/diag-reports/houston-diag.html

Thematic Reports

- "Predictive Policing & How It's Transforming our Urban Social Contract: An Overview of Police Surveillance and Algorithmic Tactics": https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/dsut/predictive-policing.html

- "Governing and Surveilling: Towards an Auditing Framework for Algorithmic Accountability in Urban Surveillance Technology": https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/dsut/algorithmic-accountability.html

- “City Power in a Time of Urban Digitalized Security”: https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/dsut/city-power.html

- “How are Security and Surveillance Technology Governed in Medellín?: A Research Report on Governance for Security Technologies”: https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/dsut/local-ordinances.html

- “The Evolution of Medellín’s Security: Can Technology Make a City Safer?”: https://edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/dsut/evolution-medellin-security.html

- “City Governments & OSS Vulnerabilities: Strengthening Cities’ Cybersecurity Through OSS Solutions”: https://edgelands.institute/Series5/contents/city-governments-oss-vulnerabilities.html

2. Creative Interventions & Visual Archives

Art was central to our methodology, serving as the bridge between data and emotion and making the invisible visible. These projects demonstrate how creative outputs can stimulate public debate.

- The Art Books (I–IV): A four-volume collection documenting the social contracts of Medellín, Cúcuta, Nairobi, Geneva, and Houston.

  - “What is the ART BOOK?”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/artbooks/what-is-the-artbook.html

  - Art Book 1: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/artbooks/art-book-no1.html

  - Art Book 2: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/artbooks/art-book-no2.html

- Art Book 3: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/artbooks/art-book-no3.html

- Magnum Photos Collaborations that expose the physical and digital traces of surveillance in everyday life:

  - “Magnum × Edgelands 2021-2025”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/edgelands-magnum.html

  - “Photographing the Invisible with the Magnum Agency”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/photographing-the-invisible.html

  - Magnum × Edgelands Medellín. Photographer–Peter Van Agtmael: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/mxe-medellin.html

  - Magnum × Edgelands Geneva. Photographer–Thomas Dworzak: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/mxe-geneva.html

  - Magnum × Edgelands Nairobi. Photographer–Lindokuhle Sobekwa: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/mxe-nairobi.html

  - Magnum × Edgelands Houston. Photographer–Yael Martínez: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/mxe-houston.html

- Art Exhibitions:

  - «Common Grounds» (MATZA × Edgelands Medellín): https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/matza/matza-edgelands-medellin.html

  - «Under the Radar» (Matza × Edgelands Geneva): https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/matza/matza-edgelands-geneva.html

- «Blurred Lines” (MATZA × Edgelands Cúcuta): https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/matza/matza-edgelands-cucuta.html

- “Digital Informalities” (Matza × Edgelands Nairobi): https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/matza/matza-edgelands-nairobi.html

- “Glitch Lab” (Art Residency Houston): https://edgelands.institute/Series1/contents/glitch-lab/glitch-lab-art-residency-show-en.html

- Artworks from fellows and artists in residence:

  - Billion Tekleab, “Border Prayer”: https://edgelands.institute/Series1/contents/glitch-lab/border-prayer-en.html

  - Sol Diaz-Peña, “Here Forever & Today”: https://edgelands.institute/Series1/contents/glitch-lab/here-forever-today-en.html

  - Jack Morillo, “Lyric Examination”: https://edgelands.institute/Series1/contents/glitch-lab/lyric-examination-en.html

  - Emre Altindağ, “The Cost of Being Homeless in the Age of Smart Cities”: https://edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/fellowships/cost-being-homeless-artwork-en.html

  - Betsy Campbell, “Embodied Ways of Knowing: https://edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/fellowships/embodied-ways-of-knowing-en.html

  - Omid Milani, “The Legend of Oko” https://edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/safe-spaces/legend-oko.html

- Brunni Corsato, “Trust Scripts”: https://edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/safe-spaces/trust-scripts.html

- Anthony Muisyo, “The Enlightened”: https://edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/safe-spaces/enlightened.html

- Luca Forcucci, “We Are All Cyborgs Now”: https://edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/safe-spaces/cyborgs.html

3. Participatory Tools & Educational Kits

Empowering communities to map, analyze, and act. We did not just study citizens; we trained them to be co-researchers. These tools allow other organizations to replicate our participatory methods.

- «Dropping the Pin on Surveillance: A Civic Methodology to Account for Surveillance Technologies in Cities”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/pdi/dropping-the-pin-on-surveillance-methodology.html

- “Decoding Security, Coexistence and Surveillance in Medellín”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/pdi/decoding-scs-medellin.html

- “Another Urban Social Contract is Possible: Learnings from Te Estamos Grabando”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/research-sprints/learnings-te-estamos-grabando.html

- “Te Estamos Grabando Cúcuta: Vigilancia, Seguridad y Tecnología”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/research-sprints/te-estamos-grabando-cucuta.html

- “We Are Recording You Geneva: Surveillance, Security, and Technologies in the City”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/research-sprints/we-are-recording-you-geneva-report.html

- “Mapping My Spaces From Security and Surveillance: Experience Guide”: https://edgelands.institute/Series5/contents/experience-guides.html

- “Designing Digital Safe Spaces with Empathy: A Toolkit”: https://edgelands.institute/Series5/contents/digital-safe-space-toolkit.html

- “A Pop-Up Playbook: Engaging Communities To Rethink How We Live Together in the Digital Age. An Edgelands Institute Approach”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series5/contents/methodology-playbook.html

- “Another Urban Social Contract Is Possible. Reflections from a Five-Years Journey”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series5/contents/narrative-document.html

4. Digital Assets & Data Repositories

Interactive platforms for transparency and engagement.

- “Dropping the Pin on Surveillance: Capturing Cameras in Geneva”: https://edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/pdi/dropping-the-pin-on-surveillance-blogpost.html

- A database of academic studies, regulations, and news articles regarding digital surveillance in Geneva and Switzerland: https://edgelands.institute/Series5/contents/annotated-bibliography.html

- Audio and video archives featuring student research, expert interviews, and dialogue from across all five cities:

- “Are You Aware of the Surveillance Society? (With Bernard Rappaz)”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/new-ra/bernard-rappaz.html

- “Café Croissant No. 1”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/sparking-dialogue/cafe-croisant-no1.html

- “Café Croissant Event no. 2: Digital Surveillance”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/sparking-dialogue/cafe-croissant-event2.html

- “Cameron Samuels Exposes Discriminatory Web Filters in Texas Schools”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/new-ra/cameron-samules-web-filters.html

- Conversation with Experts and Research Podcasts from the research sprints “We Are Recording You” in Medellín, Cúcuta, Geneva, and Nairobi: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series3/research-sprints.html

- “Dangers of Technology”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/sparking-dialogue/dangers-of-technology.html

- “Designing Research Sprints about the Digitalization of Security (with Laura García Vargas)”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/research-sprints/designing-research-sprints-full.html

- “Edgelands x Magnum: The Art of Photographing Surveillance”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/mxe-photographing-surveillance.html

- “Including Citizens in the Discussion About Surveillance (with Yves Daccord)”: https://www.edgelands.institute/institute/citizens-discussion-surveillance.html

- “Magnum Edgelands: Interview with Thomas Dworzak”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/int-T.-Dworzak.html

- “Magnum Edgelands: Interview with Peter Van Agtmael”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/int-P.-Van-Agtmael.html

- “People VS Experts”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/new-ra/people-vs-experts.html

- “Recomendaciones para la seguridad, vigilancia y tecnología de Medellín”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series1/contents/local-surveillance/recomendaciones.html

- “Surveillance, Discrimination, and Tech Theater in Nairobi Kenya (with Nanjira Sambuli)”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/sparking-dialogue/surveillance-discrimination-tech-theater-nairobi.html

- “Surveillance & Society”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/new-ra/surveillance-&-society.html

- “The Digitalisation of Urban Security Parameters as a Tool to Optimize Urban Mobility”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/fellowships/urbsec-parameters-video.html

- “The Evolution of Medellín’s Security: Can Technology Make a City Safer?”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/dsut/evolution-medellin-security.html

- “Through the Lens of Surveillance: an Interview with Magnum Photographer Lindokhule Sobekwa”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series3/contents/magnum/int-L.-Sobekwa.html

- “Understanding the Issues”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series2/contents/sparking-dialogue/understanding-the-issues.html

- “ Ways of Knowing”: https://www.edgelands.institute/Series4/contents/new-ra/ways-of-knowing.html

Conclusion: Beyond the Pop-Up

When the Edgelands Institute first arrived in Medellín, Cúcuta, Geneva, Nairobi, and Houston, our temporary nature was one of our defining features. We were a “pop-up” organization—brief, intense, and designed to leave. As we now close this chapter, it is clear that our legacy was never about how long we stayed, but about the dynamic we created in the spaces where we hosted conversations, research, and art, and the curiosity and interest that these sparked, as well as what we ultimately left behind.

For five years, we operated under the simple hypothesis that the digitalization of security requires not just new technology, but also a new social contract. We discovered that when people are treated as co-authors rather than data points, art is used to humanize code, and young people are empowered as researchers, the conversation shifts from fear to possibility.

As we step away, the definition of security is still being contested. All too often, the prevailing narrative equates safety with surveillance, control, and the sacrifice of civil liberties. Our journey proved that this is a false dichotomy and that another path is possible—one where security is rooted in care, inclusion, and dignity.

We encourage the next generation of urban leaders, technologists, artists, and policymakers to reject the notion that technology is an unavoidable force to be managed. Instead, we should continue to ask ourselves: how can we design systems that serve our shared humanity?

Continuing the Conversation

Five years ago, we recognized the importance of exploring and raising awareness of the issues surrounding the increased digitalization of security and its impact on how we live together in cities. These issues remain highly relevant today, perhaps even more so.

Who defines what is safe? Who is included in the social contract? How can we live with technology and not lose our humanity?

These questions guided our conversations throughout this period, and they continue to lie at the core of our societies. So let's continue to be bold and keep asking them, seeking alternative paths for our shared future.

Although this is the final report of the Edgelands Institute, the tools, reports, and methodologies that we have developed are yours to adapt, remix, and expand. We invite you to explore our archive, get inspired by the ideas of our network, and take the leap by adapting our methodologies for your local and cultural context. Whether you are a city councillor in Bogotá, a teacher in Chicago, or an artist in Cape Town, the questions we have raised are yours to keep exploring.

Some projects are already popping up beyond Edgelands, such as La Tour en Communs and Loom, and we hope that many more will continue to emerge.

We must ensure that the future of our cities is shaped not only by algorithms, but also by the trust we build, the spaces we reclaim, and the conversations we dare to have.

Thank you to the citizens, partners, artists, fellows, and sponsors who made this journey possible.

Prepared by: Laura García Vargas
Designed by: Samuel Schmidt

POLICÍA