Rebecca Dalzell ~ A City To Grow Into

"It sounds utopian, I know," says Daniel Haime, standing over the map of Serena del Mar, the city he is building on the Caribbean Sea. He plans to transform a 2,500-acre site outside Cartagena, Colombia – which his family bought in 1968 – into a lively metropolis. There will be a world-class hospital, low-income housing and state-run schools, a marina and bike trails, a luxury hotel and waterfront dining. One day, vaporetti on the lagoon could connect Serena del Mar to downtown Cartagena.

It seems like an auspicious time to build a new city in Colombia. In 2016, the government and the FARC rebel group signed a peace deal ending 50 years of conflict. A cautious optimism buoys the economy. Bogotá and Medellín, the country's largest cities, have become models for smart urban design. But not Cartagena. It may be one of the fastest-growing cities in Colombia but, according to Nicolás Galarza Sanchez, a research scholar at New York University's Marron Institute of Urban Management, it is also a case study in how not to expand. It has spread in a fashion typical of South America: high-rise condominiums for the rich have sprouted along the waterfront while poor settlements made up of squalid, informal dwellings have grown in areas prone to flooding. Galarza and his colleagues are working with the Colombian government to help manage growth in 100 cities across the country.

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