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COLOMBIA, MEDELLIN

Reshaping Medellín through Social Urbanism

Medellin is the second largest city in Colombia and the capital of the department of Antioquia. It constitutes, together with other nine neighbouring cities, the second largest agglomeration in Colombia in terms of population and economy, with approximately 2.44 million inhabitants and accounting for 11% of the Colombian economy. Medellín is a relevant hub for education, industrial and commercial activities, science, health services, leisure and entertainment. During the eighties and the nineties drug trafficking and bombings made the city inhospitable. Nevertheless the city registered a demographic growth, due to rural exodus. The development model of the city combined with the ongoing process of urban sprawl and the population growth, increased fragmentation of the territory and exclusion of the poor population at the metropolitan and city scales.

Since 2003, the elected mayors brought a more holistic paradigm to territorial planning, defined by social urbanism. It consisted of physical transformations in the urban fringes which sought to make public places safe and accessible, connecting these areas to the city center, and considering environmental factors in the reintegration of the city. Secondly, the social transformation followed the former components by fostering community and individual participation in urban regulation, economic integration and reducing fear and violence to encourage solidarity-based cohabitation.

The specific tool that enabled these transformations was the Integral Urban Project (IUP), which targeted specific locations characterised by unrest and poverty, and where a 40% of Medellín's population lived. The IUP envisioned a set of innovative, original and adapted development projects to leverage urban mobility for inhabitants, installing improved transportation systems and urban services within these particular sites.

Through the IUP, Medellín managed to articulate its Structuring Master Plan with fixed interventions in order to foster territorial dynamism, connect territories, integrate economic activities, promote social inclusion and contribute to the creation of peaceful neighborhoods. Furthermore, the physical interventions such as automatic escalators, the Library Parks and the Metrocable are known worldwide and attract leisure and professional tourism. As a result of the transparent and efficient management of the projects and resources, tax collection has increased by 35% between 2003 and 2007. Furthermore, the homicide rate has reduced by 80% over the past twenty years. This demonstrates how social urbanism in Medellín has contributed to the construction of peace by establishing a new civic culture and enhancing participative tools in its methodology, clarifying duties and rights relative to prevention of delinquency and violence.