SHAPING NEW URBAN ENVIRONMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA: THE CASE OF MEDELLIN, COLOMBIA

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In this paper we present a brief analysis of urban demographic growth in Latin-America, in order to understand the nature of the process in recent years. According to United Nations statistics, the process of urbanization in Latin America has been remarkable in recent years (41% of its population lived in cities in 1950, in 2000 reached 78% and in the next 40 years it will rise over 80%). Still, these countries have experienced different paces of urban growth, being in different stages of urbanization (or urban transition). The particular case of Colombia will be analyzed as a country that has undergone a later urbanization process (after 1930) and has urbanized very quickly. The main reason for this rapid process of urbanization is the disadvantaged economic and social conditions of rural areas in association with civil violence which characterizes the process of urbanization in some Latin-American countries. Both facts brought specific problems for Colombian cities that local governments have been trying to solve in the last 20 years. The case of Medellin will be presented as a city that some authors associate to the so called Models of Urban Cultural Development. The social urbanism of Medellin is presented as a tool to promote inclusion through education and huge investments in the public degraded areas of the city. We will present some of these interventions, their purposes and effects in the improving of urban life.

Keywords: Urbanization, Regeneration, Social urbanism, Medellin.

Introduction

The State of the World's Cities Report, entitled "Bridging the Urban divide" (UN-HABITAT, 2010/2011) recognized urbanization has a positive force for transformation. Considering that the world is increasingly urbanized, using urbanization in order to deal with many problems of human existence in different continents seems inevitable. It is true that the growth of cities presents different challenges for governments in different regions of the world; still there is no turning back in the process. Thus, the way cities are treating its inhabitants seems to be directly linked to the prosperity of nations.

This idea of viewing urbanization as a positive force for transformation lays in the fact that it has allowed to reduce overall poverty by providing new opportunities, higher incomes and increasing the number of livelihood options for both rural and urban populations. When supported by well adapted policies urbanization plays an important role in poverty reduction. The problem is that this is not the reality of many countries and cities of the world, particularly in the developing world (UN-HABITAT, 2010/2011).

In what concerns Latin American countries the United Nations report states that this region presents satisfactory results in terms of reducing extreme poverty in cities. In fact, Argentina, Colombia and Dominican Republic are presented as the most successful countries in the region over the past decade. In terms of urban inequality it is even declining in some Latin American countries. This seems to be the result of important efforts to bridge the urban divide (whether it is social, economic, political, or cultural) with cities getting involved in urban policies programs that improve social inclusion and implement the concept of "right to the city" [1] the right to an urban environment where mutual respect, democracy and social justice prevail.

This idea that cities have a responsibility concerning the improvement of their inhabitants living conditions is well stated in the Charter of Educating Cities (IAEC, 2004) in its preamble where we can read:

> "The right to live in an educating city must constitute a relevant guarantee of the principles of equality for all, social justice, and territorial balance."

In the following chapters we will present some important aspects related to the process of urbanization in Latin American countries in general and the case of Colombia in particular. Following we will analyse the case of the city of Medellin many times presented as an example of a city compromised with social transformation, a city involved in shaping a new human, social and cultural environment.

Urban Growth in Latin America

The most interesting feature of the urban growth in Latin America is the fact that in the second half of the twentieth century this region changed from being predominantly rural to being predominantly urban. According to Pacione (2010) the rapid urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean relates to the scale of economic growth that happened in several countries. Thus, this author identifies three groups of nations in this region according to the level of urbanization:

- – The most urbanized, with over 80% of the population living in urban areas. In this group we have countries like Venezuela, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. These countries have a long tradition of urban development based on intense levels of immigration from Europe in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. However, the land ownership structure provided immigrants little opportunity to buy land and consequently they settled in the cities;
- – The second group, with urbanization levels between 50% and 80%, includes most of the countries that experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization between 1950 and 1990: Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and others like Bolivia, Peru and Trinidad Tobago;
- – The third group, with less than 50% of the population living in urban areas, includes less populous countries such as Paraguay, Haiti and Costa Rica;

In the last decade of the twentieth century the region already had 300 million urban inhabitants and thirty six "million cities" including 3 "mega cities" – Mexico City, São Paulo and Buenos Aires. According to the UN – Habitat Report (2011) South America will be the most urban region in the world (91, 4%) followed by Northern Europe (90, 7%) and North America (90, 2%). As we have presented above these numbers represent different situations. In fact, Cerrutti (2003) considers that the intensity of urbanization has decreased in the last decades as the levels of urbanization are already very high in some countries but also as a result of demographic dynamics. Migration from rural areas to urban areas has

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[1] The "right to the city" has evolved over the past 50 years as a challenge to the exclusionary development, selective benefit-sharing, marginalization and discrimination that are rampant in cities today. More than a new legalistic device, the right to the city is the expression of the deep yearnings of urban dwellers for effective recognition of their various human rights. The concept has been deployed in various ways across regions, countries and cities of the world (UN- HABITAT, 2010/2011).

even decreased in some countries. But in the group of countries with intermediate and lower levels of urbanization the growth of urban population continues at important rates.

Table 1. Latin America and Caribbean: Urban population by country (1970 – 2020).

Stage of Urban Transition	1970-2020										
	Años										
	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Advanced urban transition											
Argentina	78.4	80.7	83.0	84.9	86.9	88.3	89.6	90.6	91.4	92.0	92.5
Bahamas	71.8	73.4	75.1	79.7	83.6	86.5	88.5	90.0	90.9	91.5	92.0
Barbados	37.1	38.6	40.2	42.5	44.8	47.3	50.0	52.8	55.6	58.4	61.1
Chile	73.0	76.0	79.0	81.1	82.8	84.4	85.7	86.9	87.9	88.8	89.6
Jamaica	41.5	44.1	46.8	49.2	51.5	53.7	56.1	58.5	61.0	63.5	65.9
Uruguay	82.0	82.9	86.1	89.2	90.5	91.7	92.6	93.1	93.7	93.9	94.0
Venezuela	71.8	75.4	78.9	81.6	83.9	85.8	87.4	88.8	89.9	90.8	91.5
Right Urban Transition	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Brasil	55.6	61.4	67.3	71.0	74.7	77.5	79.9	81.7	83.1	84.2	85.0
Colombia	57.7	61.8	64.4	67.0	69.4	71.7	74.5	76.6	78.4	80.0	81.4
Cuba	60.1	64.1	68.0	71.6	74.8	77.6	79.9	81.9	83.4	84.7	85.7
Mexico	58.9	62.3	65.5	68.6	71.4	73.4	75.4	77.2	78.8	80.2	81.3
Peru	58.1	61.9	64.2	66.3	68.7	71.2	72.3	73.5	74.6	75.5	76.3
Trinidad y Tobago	63.0	63.0	63.1	66.2	69.1	71.7	74.1	76.1	77.8	79.3	80.7
Moderate Urban Transition	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Bolivia	36.2	40.5	45.4	50.5	55.6	60.4	64.6	68.2	71.0	73.1	74.8
Ecuador	39.5	41.8	47.1	51.3	55.4	59.2	62.7	65.8	68.5	70.7	72.5
El Salvador	39.0	41.5	44.1	47.0	49.8	52.5	55.2	57.8	60.3	62.6	64.7
Nicaragua	46.8	48.8	50.1	51.4	52.5	53.9	55.3	56.7	58.1	59.4	60.6
Panama	47.6	48.7	49.7	51.7	53.8	55.7	57.6	59.5	61.2	62.9	64.5
Paraguay	37.1	39.0	41.6	44.9	48.6	52.4	56.1	59.6	62.9	65.7	68.2
Rep. Dominicana	39.7	44.7	49.9	52.3	53.7	57.1	60.2	62.9	65.3	67.4	69.1
Behind Urban Transition	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Costa Rica	38.8	41.3	43.1	44.8	46.7	48.5	50.4	52.3	54.2	56.1	57.9
Guatemala	36.2	36.7	37.2	37.5	38.0	38.6	39.4	39.9	40.5	41.2	41.8
Haiti	19.7	22.2	24.5	27.2	30.5	34.3	38.1	41.8	45.3	48.4	51.3
Honduras	29.0	32.0	35.0	37.7	40.8	44.4	48.2	52.1	55.9	59.5	62.7

Source: CEPAL (2001)

Table 1 shows us the heterogeneity of the process of urbanization in Latin America. The most urbanized countries are those that experienced an early demographic transition (migration from rural to urban areas). According to Pacione (2010) in those countries with sustained economic growth urbanization is likely to increase.

The emergency of new cities with comparative advantages is also a reality in Latin America. The intermediate cities (between 100 000 and 1 million inhabitants) appear as important urban centers with a growing importance in the process of urbanization in many countries. Intermediate cities are growing and developing thanks to processes of relocation of activities that used to be located in larger cities. And this flow of resources has created a new population flow in many countries.

It seems clear that it is difficult to accept generalizations in what concerns the process of urban growth in Latin America. Some trends are common to the majority of the countries such as the growing urbanization rates and the fact that it mainly results from internal migration movements that exploded in the last decades of the twentieth century. Another common issue is the effect of this urban explosion in what concerns the quality of life in the largest cities.

In the next chapter we will analyze the particular case of urban growth in Colombia. We will try to relate the phenomena in this country to the general tendency in Latin America and also try to identify aspects related to the history of the country that do not fit the usual generalizations. We will try to understand the phenomena of urban growth within a geographical, historical and social context. Only this way it will be possible to understand the kind of problems urban explosion has caused and how countries and cities try to minimize and solve them.

Urbanization in Colombia: Migration and Civil Conflicts

Colombia is in the group of countries that have known a rapid process of industrialization and urbanization between 1950 and 1990 with urbanization levels between 50% and 80% (Pacione, 2010). These levels of urbanization are to grow in the next decades reaching levels above 80% (Table 1).

According to Sanchez (2007) the main reasons for the rapid urban growth of Colombia in the second half of the twentieth century were not only the demographic growth of the population (associated to high fertility rates and the diminishing of mortality rates in urban areas) but mainly the increasing migration rates from rural areas to urban areas. The conflicts for land in rural areas, the devaluation of agricultural products in the world market and the increasing industrialization of cities explain these mass movements towards Colombian cities.

What seems to differentiate the urban growth of Colombia from other countries is the fact that this rural urban migration was very rapid as it was aggravated by the civil conflicts that the country faced in the 40´s. As Fajardo (2002, cited by Sanchez, 2007) puts it civil conflict in Colombia was responsible for huge migrations from rural areas towards the cities. And these "forced displacements" of rural population towards the cities are presented as the second explanation for the high rates of urbanization that the country had in the second half of the twentieth century.

It is important to mention that these explanations of the huge arrival of population to urban areas since 1950 are not consensual among researchers. As Sanchez (2007) notes some researchers defend the idea that in Colombia the process of urbanization was in fact divorced from the process of industrialization. The rural – urban migration was a normal process of transference from rural population to urban areas for economical reasons as rural areas faced economic depression. Others consider without any doubt that modern Colombian cities are a result of violence and a product of forced and accelerated urbanization.

The UNFPA Report (2007) devoted to the process of urbanization in Colombia clearly states that during the decade of the 60's and the 70´s of the twentieth century urban growth in the country was a consequence of high rates of rural – urban migration, which was a consequence of civil conflict that had an important expression in rural areas, difficulty to access land ownership and the introduction of mechanization processes in agriculture areas. This process of rural – urban migration still happens in Colombia and is the main reason of the continuous urban growth. Regardless the explanation of rural – urban migration, its impact in the shaping of Colombian urban life is certainly a product of a rapid urbanization growth that happened in different ways in the diverse Colombian cities.

Urban growth of Colombia was very different internally. As a consequence Colombia is a country of cities of different positions in the urban hierarchy. The process of population concentration in Bogota makes the capital of Colombia a future "megacity" - in 2005 accommodated 16% (almost 7 million inhabitants) of the Colombian population (UNFPA, 2007). In a second urban hierarchy level with over 1 million population there are 3 cities: Medellin, Cali y Barranquilla.

The urban system in Colombia has a hierarchy of cities situated along the valleys of the high mountains and along the coast of Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean that contain approximately 80 % of the country population. The primacy of the capital dominates the urban system, followed by 3 cities of second level in the urban rank (with a population between one and five million inhabitants), 33 intermediate cities with a population between 100 000 and one million inhabitants and more than 1000 urban centers with less than 100 000 inhabitants.

Table 2. Population of the main cities of Colombia.

City	Population	Department
Bogota	6 840 000	Bogota
Medellin	2 216 830	Antioquia
Calli	2 119 908	Valle del Cauca
Barranquila	1 146 359	Atlantico

Source: DANE (2005)

These main cities present are dispersed in the country in a close relation to the topography as mentioned before. Some are situated in the valleys of the mountains that dominate the country others have developed in the coastal areas.

Source: www.colombiaexplorer.com/colombia-maps

Figure 1. Topographical map of Colombia and location of the main cities.

In the next chapter we will focus in the city of Medellin. As in all Colombian cities the rapid process of urbanization created problems of sustainability directly related to the problems the country has faced, in particular the civil conflicts that also reached urban areas.

Reinventing the City: The Case of Medellin

In 1991, in the National University of Colombia, Escobar (1991) presented an overview of what was happening in the city of Medellin as a consequence of decades of migrant population arrival. We will try to summarize the main aspects of urban environment presented by this researcher:

- A segregated city where the classes of medium and high income are building their own ghettos – their relation with the city is mediated by the private transport;
- The low income population is force to live in the "incomplete" city, in congested, profoundly stigmatized and deprived areas;
- In terms of planning, the city is no longer an organized place with built areas and public space – after the 70's the city has grown in terms of building density but the public space was forgotten; new avenues and roads have been built in order to facilitate mobility in the city but no new public space has been generated;

In her Master's research Fernadez (2009) refers to the city of Medellin in the 1990's as a city facing a deep values crisis, of growing inequalities and violence. This city is in fact a product of the diverse and

complex social events that happened in Colombia. The city of the 90's was the result of an unplanned rapid urban growth that we analyzed in the previous chapter. Medellin in the 90's seemed like a city without a future, where poverty, inequalities and high rates of violence, made it almost "impossible to change".

In her article about Medellin, Sanchez (2010) refers to the city of Medellin in the decade of 1990 as a "broken city". Broken by social injustice, the concentration of health in the hands of a minority, growing poverty and unemployment and the inefficiency of Government to control some areas that turned to illegal activities to survive such as drug trafficking and phenomena associated with paramilitary groups, urban guerrilla movements and common criminals.

The most important areas of intervention were identified in the Development Plan 2004 – 2007 of Medellin, or as Roldán (2011) refers, the social debt of the municipality with the territory and its inhabitants was diagnosed:

- – The abandon of the northern areas of the city and consequent deterioration of living conditions;
- – The social inequalities as cause for the increasing number of underprivileged areas;
- – The lack of organization and quality of the public space and its devaluation as a citizen meeting and interaction scenario;
- – The wrong occupation and deterioration of public space as a consequence of private and not planned occupation;
- – The progressive abandon of the traditional centre;
- – The lack of quality educational infrastructures for the underprovided population;
- – The dominance of the private transport over the public transport system which was not planned with efficiency;
- – The environmental degradation caused by the not planned development of the city and its systems of production;

It was then necessary to give back the city to its inhabitants and the inhabitants back to the city. The importance of public space in the city as the expression of the right to urban life had to be reshaped. Otherwise the city of Medellin would perpetuate the model of segregation, fear and violence that characterized its urban environment. It was necessary to intervene in the city in terms of urban regeneration.

Urban regeneration is an integrated vision and action to address urban problems trough a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area, being one of the most important strategies to address inner city decline and deprivation (Tsenkova, 2002). We will focus our presentation in some of these interventions of urban regeneration in Medellin, namely the public space intervention and the educational model.

In Medellin the process of urban regeneration through intervention in the public space and education was set in motion by Sergio Fajardo, the Mayor of Medellin between 2004 and 2007 – it was necessary to intervene in terms of infrastructures of the city through the building of a mass system of transport (Metrocable) that connects the peripheral neighbourhoods to the city centre; the building and reconstruction of hundreds of schools; the creation in underprivileged neighbourhoods of Library - Parks and it was very important to include citizen participation in this process as well as develop a sense of security and citizenship culture through programs of reintegration of armed civilian groups, increasing the number of policeman. This was the basis to have more confidence in the city council and implement programs of cultural development and social commitment (Yúdice, 2008).

The Medellin city council placed education in the centre of this process of urban regeneration considering it the driving force for social transformation. The idea was to view social urbanism as an instrument for social inclusion. So, most of the public and social intervention should be done in the poor areas of the city (Sanchéz, 2010). And this is the core of social urbanism – create a social impact in poor areas through relevant and high quality investments.

According to Franco (2011) social urbanism intended to reinforce the integration of the city of Medellin connecting centre and periphery, investing in public spaces that could be shared by the

population and in cultural and educational activities that would contribute to social inclusion. During the first decade of the twenty-first century these projects started being set in motion – the Metrocable system, the Library Parks and several projects of public space creation.

Source: http://catedramedellinbarcelona.org/
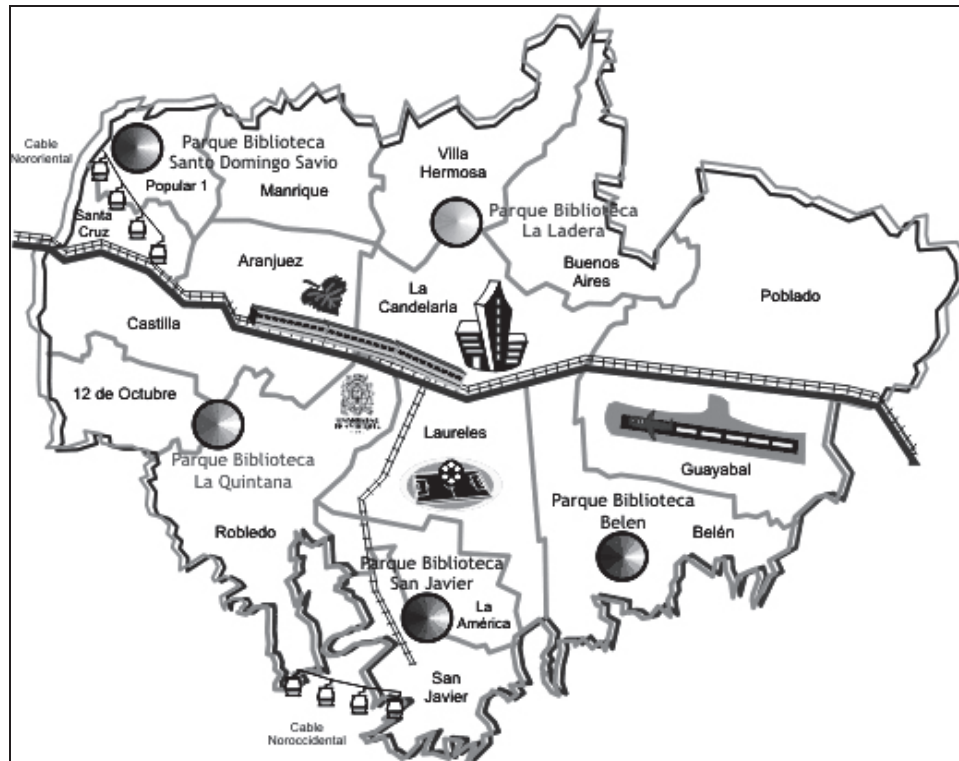
Figure 2. Library – Parks and Metrocable in Medellin.

These Library Parks are a good example of how Medellin assumed itself as educational city. According to the Charter of Educating Cities (2004) "the municipal administration must equip the city with spaces, facilities and public services that are suitable for the personal, social, moral and cultural development of all its inhabitants, paying special attention to children and youth." The five (now six and four more on the way) Library Parks build all over the city are also international prized architectural projects that have changed city landscape forever. They were conceived as inclusive public spaces, fostering education, recreation, culture and art.

This Library - Park project was initiated with the inauguration in 2006 of the Library Park Ptro Jose Luis Arroyave en San Javier, in the western part of the city, the second most populated area of Medellin where there were no educational or community projects and spaces. This was also one of the most dangerous areas of Medellin in terms of criminality. The Library Park represents an important intervention in terms of connection the area with the city, a public park directed to leisure and cultural activities and the main building that accommodates an auditorium, the main Library, study rooms, about 100 computers and exhibitions halls among other facilities.

The second Library Park inaugurated in 2007, was built in the area of La Ladera, it is called Library Park Léon de Greiff, and it is located in the place where there used to be a prison facility deactivated in the 70's. It was an area with a huge deficit in terms of urban infrastructure and equipments. The Library Park stands in one of the mountains around Medellin, in the oriental part of the city and represents a project of urban renovation in the area. Not only offers sport, educational and cultural activities centered

in the Library and a public park for the inhabitants of the area but it also has an important observation position over the city of Medellin which attracts numerous visitors to enjoy the amazing view.

The Library Park Tomas Carrasquilla, known as La Quintana was inaugurated also in 2007, and it is located in the most densely occupied area of Medellin, an area with high rates of poverty, a critical deficit in terms of infrastructure, public space, urban equipment and cultural spaces. It stands in the Norwest part of Medellin and was built to create a new centrality and a new axle of growth of the city associate with the development of a new public transport line, the Metroplus. More than a Library it offers open public space that intends to be not only a place of meeting for the communities but also a place to discover and enjoy nature.

The Library Park Santo Domingo Savio, España, inaugurated in 2007, locates in one of the highest areas around the city and also gives an overwhelming view over the city of Medellin. It is located in the north oriental area of the city that had high rates of violence and a very poor population. The Library includes community services and cultural and educational activities for the population. The name Library Park España comes from the contribution made by the Spanish government through the Spanish International Cooperation Agency with the provision of an auditorium.

In 2008 the Library Park Belén was inaugurated in an area also known for high rates of violence where there were some security facilities. It was a joint project with the University of Tokyo and was designed by the architect Hiroishi Naito. It is an interesting concept of buildings and open public space and intends to integrate several close neighborhoods. Besides public space and cultural and educational events, this Library offers the opportunity to explore Japanese culture and architecture.

The Library Park Fernando Botero was inaugurated in 2011 in the semi - rural district of San Cristobál. It is the newest Library Park intervention and represents the need to carry out social intervention in the area. San Cristobál has gained visibility due to a new highway connecting the Pacific and Caribbean coasts that passes through the district. The architect was Orlando García and it is one of biggest Library Parks in what concerns the building and public space intervention. It offers several cultural and educational programmes as well as Library facilities and also social services.

The process of building the Library Parks in the poorest areas of the city involved local citizen participation from the beginning. This was done trough the creation of "Citizen Pacts" between the inhabitants of those urban areas and the City council. In its strategy from 2004, "Medellin the best educated", the city council considered that it was necessary to pursue a deep urban transformation and that could only be done through citizen participation and commitment. According to the former Mayor Fajardo (2007) the only way to regenerate the city would have to be through the involvement of the community in all development projects of the city. Social urbanism meant having a deep commitment with the citizens, through dialogue with local communities, acting according to their needs and interests. And only this way it would be possible to assure that the urban transformation would be appropriate by the citizens.

Conclusion

The process of urban regeneration in Medellin is an ongoing one. More Library Parks are on the way for the next years. They attest the success in terms of public space intervention through educational projects as the Library Parks are clearly community orientated projects having in view social inclusion - they represent the effort to create safe meeting places for different communities in order to diminish social segregation. The Library Parks also stand as important interventions in order to dignify less privileged areas of the city and are part of a wider politic of social and educational development.

As we tried to demonstrate reshaping the urban environment of Medellin implied viewing the city as responsible for its citizens. The Development Plan 2008 -2011 includes some aspects of this "reshaping" of the city that goes beyond its physical landscape. The need to continue social and educational projects as the catalysts for social transformation in Medellin was defended by the new mayor Salazar.

The research being done in worldwide universities about the model of social urbanism of Medellin has increased in recent years. It is now important to learn how people's lives have been changing and this has been the theme of numerous conferences and thesis – the city that changes in order to include all its citizens. According to Giraldo (2010) the Library Parks are presently places of citizenship participation in deprived areas – these interventions have helped to change these underprivileged neighbourhoods in terms of urban building improvements but also in what the author refers to as social and economical expectations that should improve citizens' relation and help to strengthen communities; interestingly the Library Parks have also become touristic attractions in the city welcoming many visitants and helping to break the cycle of fear and insecurity of these neighbourhoods giving a new "image" to these once stigmatized communities.

To Oliveira (2011) the research being done in the Library Parks among those that have attended shows that a huge percentage of people did not have any access to cultural and artistic activities, nor to recreation areas because the majority lived in areas with a complete absence of public policies. Between January and May of 2009 the Library Parks received more than 1400 thousand visits, which is an amazing figure considering that the population of Medellin is around 2200 thousand inhabitants.

Considering that urban regeneration is an integrated vision and action to address urban problems trough a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of decline or deprived urban areas, it is possible to say that the intervention being done in Medellin is an important example in terms of urban environment improvement. In the particular context of a rapid and continuing urban growth, and high rates of poverty, Medellin represents a clear effort to improve the life of its citizens trying to break the cycle of exclusion and viewing education as the means to help building a better future. As an educating city, Medellin is undergoing important physical, social and educational interventions that will certainly shape the future of its citizens.

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