# Medellín, Colombia:
# Comprehensive Urban Project - North-Eastern Zone[1]

**Name of the policy:** Comprehensive Urban Project, North-Eastern Zone, Medellín

**Start date:** 2003

**Completion date:** 2007

## CONTEXT

### City context

Medellín (the city and municipality) is the capital of the department of Antioquia. It has 2,636,101 inhabitants (2010 census), while its metropolitan area, which includes nine other municipalities, has 3,740,000 inhabitants (2010 census). As regards its economic fabric, Medellín is renowned for its financial, services and industrial sectors, and is one of the most important cities in Colombia. Some of the social programmes implemented by the city government led to a decline in the poverty rate from 49.7% to 38.5% during the period between 2002 and 2008 (although the Colombian national average is 30.7%). A similar process occurred with the unemployment rate, which was around 14% in 2010, while some years previously it was 17% (although it remained above the Colombian national average of 11.2% in 2010). The

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city is divided into six zones, which are in turn divided into 16 communes, and these communes are divided into *barrios* (249) and institutional areas (20).

**Governmental decentralization context**

The Colombian decentralization system is sanctioned by the Constitution of 1991, which reconciles the declaration of Colombia as a unitary republic with the establishment of three administrative levels: the State, departments and municipalities. The country is divided into 32 departments, and each of these is divided into municipalities (the third administrative unit, of which there are 1,099). The division of powers system was developed in the 1990s after the constitution was adopted.

Each department has an executive authority (the governor, elected by direct suffrage since 1992), a Department Assembly (the legislative branch) and a judiciary (departmental courts). There is a similar structure in the municipalities. Executive power lies with the Mayor, legislative power with the People's Council (both elected by popular vote) and judicial power with the municipal courts.

The powers conferred upon municipalities include: waste management, urban sanitation, drinking water, urban planning, parks and gardens, sports and recreation, mobility, culture and public safety. Colombia is one of a number of countries (others include Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and Mexico) where the intermediate and local levels of government have jurisdiction in matters of social policy and education (primary and secondary). In Colombia, the decentralization process has led to improvements in areas such as education (e.g. literacy) and health (e.g. increased coverage). However, improvements in areas such as services and basic infrastructures are still needed.

**Institutional level of policy development:** Municipal

**SOCIAL CONTEXT**

The city of Medellín has 16 communes, and the Medellín Development Plan involves action in communes 1 and 2, which have the lowest Human Development Index and a population of 170,000 inhabitants. Six Comprehensive Urban Projects (CUPs) have been carried out. The first of these is the North-eastern CUP (discussed here). The other CUPs in operation are:

> The Commune 13 CUP.139,353 inhabitants

> The North-western CUP: 364,157 inhabitants

> The East Central CUP: 270,000 inhabitants

Two other CUPs, in La Iguana and Altavista, are currently in the design phase.

Most cases have a number of basic features in common: high levels of violence (in some cases, such as in the North-eastern Zone, this is linked to the Medellín cartel and paramilitary groups); informal urban development based on illegal settlements (with illegal connections to public services); a shortage of facilities and social services; and high levels of unemployment and environmental degradation.

## COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE

### Description of the policy

The Comprehensive Urban Projects are programmes run by the Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano de Medellín (Medellín Urban Development Corporation), which endeavour to combine physical restoration work with improvements in terms of social inclusion for the population, and emphasize institutional coordination and public participation. These programmes are aimed at areas with physical shortcomings (generally low standards of housing due to its illegality, lack of public spaces and environmental degradation), institutional deficiencies (limited and disjointed initiatives by government bodies) and social problems (poverty, lack of opportunities and severe social exclusion, as well as high levels of violence). In this case, we describe the first of these programmes - the North-eastern CUP - which began in 2004 and which would become the laboratory for this type of project. Three CUPs have subsequently been activated, and two are in the initial phase.

### Policy objectives

A Comprehensive Urban Project *is an urban action model that aims to raise the levels of quality of life for the residents of a specific area. To that end, it concentrates all its resources on a single territory, in order to focus its efforts and achieve a result that is reflected in the comprehensive development and transformation of communities in both social and physical terms. "It is especially designed to address the most depressed and marginalized areas of the city, where the State usually has a high social debt, and to be used as a replicable model for action*" (Cárdenas 2006:28).

Its key areas of action are:

- *Improvement of initiatives by government bodies:* municipal coordination institutions and working groups are established with private social and academic organizations to achieve agreements with these sectors. The involvement of national organizations and the international cooperation sphere is also sought.

- *Reinforcement of participation:* both community organizations and the non-associated population, which will participate in all stages of the project. This participation is vital for the subsequent appropriation of the services and facilities that are created.

- *Improvement of the public space:* its importance in terms of promoting social cohesion is acknowledged, and its improvement is sought by means of specific works projects (such as parks and recreation areas) and the organization and improvement of mobility networks. Another basic objective is to improve mobility among pedestrians.

- *Construction and improvement of community facilities*: libraries, schools, health centres, etc.

- *Improvement of housing conditions:* regularization of illegal situations, restoration of housing and building of new homes, with particular attention paid to sensitive areas such as housing on mountainsides (slopes).

- *Environmental sustainability:* by reforestation, renewal of flora and fauna, environmental recovery of degraded areas, improved water treatment, etc.

**Background / Origins**

The construction of the Metrocable (a mobility and transport project by the government of Medellín which sought to link the city centre with its outlying areas) reduced the gap between this area and the city centre, and also marked the beginning of a new relationship with the government institutions, which began to examine this area of the city and to undertake improvement projects in areas close to the stations - the start of works for future CUPs.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the implementation of the CUPs, it is necessary to go back to the early 1990's, when the Comprehensive Improvement Programmes for the Suburbs began in Medellín. These were some of the first comprehensive action and restoration programmes in this type of zone to be implemented in Colombia. These programmes began in 1993 as the result of cooperation between the Colombian government, the German government and the government of the city of Medellín.

The first of these programmes focused its efforts on improving the quality of public services and promoting citizens' participation in 70 informal districts of Medellín (accounting for around 200,000 people), and achieved significant successes in terms of institutional coordination, land regulation and improvement of public services.

This legacy led to the CUPs, as part of both the 2002-2006 "Towards a Community State" National Development Plan, and the Medellín Municipal Development Plan 2004-2007.

**Chronological development and implementation of the practice**

2003: Completion of the Metrocable works

2004: Start of the North-eastern CUP.

2006: Start of the Commune 13 CUP

2007: End of the first phase of the North-eastern CUP

2008: The CUPs began in the East Central and North-western zones, as part of the 2008-2011 "Medellín, caring and competitive" Development Plan

**Agents involved**

One of the basic objectives of this urban inclusion and regeneration programme is institutional coordination, in order to improve and coordinate the investment and projects. This coordination (for which the Medellín Urban Development Corporation (EDU) was mainly responsible) involved:

- Medellín Mayor's Office
- Department of Planning
- Communications Office
- Department of Finance
- Department of Government
- Department of the Environment
- Department of Public Works
- Department of Education
- Department of Health
- Department of Social Welfare
- Department of Public Culture
- Department of Social Development
- Department of Transport and Traffic
- The Spanish Development Cooperation Agency (AECI)
- Participatory Budgeting
- Comfama (a family compensation fund, and private sector non-profit institution)
- Comfenalco (a family compensation fund, and private sector non-profit institution)
- INDER (Medellín Institute of Sports and Recreation)
- EPM (Medellín Public Enterprises, a Medellín Mayor's Office corporation)
- Piloto Public Library (a decentralized organization accountable to the Mayor's Office, the Madre del Sistema Library and the city's Library Network)
- The Valle de Aburra Metropolitan Area (environmental and transit authority of the Valle de Aburra, an area which Medellín shares with 9 other municipalities)

**Beneficiaries**

The 150,000 inhabitants of Communes 1 and 2 are direct beneficiaries of the North-eastern CUP as many collective facilities have been built, and elements that affect the entire population have been improved (such as mobility and healthcare and education coverage). Housing has also been improved, and informal situations have been regularized. In specific terms, 3,500 people obtained direct employment as a result of the works in the project, and children and older people are particular beneficiaries of the pedestrian mobility and construction works and the improvement of parks and public spaces.

**Participation processes implemented**

The process began by combining two types of diagnosis. First, a physical and socio-economic diagnosis of the area was carried out by interdisciplinary groups, analyzing factors including: 1) Means of mobility and connectivity between *barrios* in the communes and other parts of the city; 2) A census of the existing homes and the space they occupy, in order to produce a map of the full and empty territory to ascertain the public spaces that could be created in the initiative; 3) Analysis of the types of building and blocks, comparing the areas with most and least planning (the latter are generally the result of informal settlements); 4) Gradients in the land and their implications for mobility; 5) Study of heights of housing to plan their restoration; 6) Identification of the areas with the most centrality in terms of mobility and socio-economic activity, and 7) A commercial survey to identify potential commercial areas.

After this diagnosis is completed, the participation process begins, and is structured in the following phases:



Translation of the table:

|  | Planning |  |
|---|---|---|
| Diagnosis |  | Formulation |
| Administration |  |  |
| Design | Execution | Promotion |
| Phase 1 | Phase 5 | Phase 8 |
| Physical/social survey | Materials Procurement | Planning |
| Phase 2 | Phase 6 | Phase 9 |

| Project profile | Contracting | Management |
|---|---|---|
| Phase 3 | Phase 7 | Phase 10 |
| Draft architectural project | Work | Execution |
| Phase 4 | | |
| Architectural project | | |

(Cardenas 2006: 36)

This diagnosis (Phase 1) was followed by another, which began with the establishment of the Committees (of which there are four: Andalucía, Popular, Santo Domingo and Bobo). These Committees (led by a member of the project's social team, who acted as a liaison between the community and the EDU) met once a week on average, and were composed of representatives of social organizations in the territory, community leaders, senior citizens' and youth groups, and anyone not belonging to any formal group who wished to participate.

One of the most important factors in this first part of the project was related to the efforts of the technical teams to rebuild confidence in the State and its government bodies. Years of neglect and broken promises had created some degree of resentment among the inhabitants, which the technical teams had to overcome in order to initiate the process and to involve the population in it.

Once the working committees had been consolidated and the diagnoses of the areas had been carried out, the decision regarding which projects would be implemented was taken (Phase 2). This process began with visits to the *barrios* with the Committees and technical teams, in order to analyze which projects could be undertaken in each area of the *barrio*. These visits recover much of local residents' knowledge about the potential in the *barrio*, its most important spaces, its environmental wealth, imagined projects, etc., and this knowledge is the key input in the next phase of the project - the work done in the *Imagination Workshops.*

These Imagination Workshops are a participatory methodology for formulating projects based on participatory design, in which the whole population (including children) participates. In these workshops, as well as considering the meaning of the projects to be done and how they should be undertaken, a central feature is analysis of the symbolic meaning that the projects generated have or could have, and how they could overcome the conceptualization of marginalization and social exclusion that have been generated with regard to this area.

Architectural Draft Project (Phase 3): Using the projects "imagined" by the communities, the technical teams generated three-dimensional images (these images are easier to work with than architectural drawings with the populations concerned), which presented the draft projects, and they were discussed with the community. At this point, the technical and budgetary feasibility of the ideas raised in the workshop were discussed, and the outcome of these projects was reviewed, with some changes made or the projects approved. This led to phase 4 (the architectural project), in which the Committees and technical teams presented the

completed projects to the rest of the community, discussed them and reworked them until they were deemed to be completed.

Upon completion of the projects, bids were obtained for their assignment (Stage 5, procurement materials). This step is essential in creating a new culture of legality and transparency in social contexts that are accustomed to irregular assignments of work projects as a result of corruption and cronyism. After the construction companies and those responsible for the technical quality of the works had been selected (Phase 6, Procurement), they are presented to the Committee, and the details of their contracting and the work project were clarified. At this initial point, the business and community met each other and consolidated their relationship.

The construction of the work (Phase 7) started with meaningful public participation. The companies were required to hire people from the area for unskilled work (thereby addressing the high unemployment rates) and the Committees determined which criteria were followed in the recruitment, adapting these criteria to the characteristics and needs of each *barrio*. *Works committees* (composed of members of the zone Committee, construction and inspection companies and the project's technical team) were established to monitor the work.

Phases 8, 9 and 10 relate to management and appropriation of the works by the communities. In order to foster appropriation and use of the spaces and the infrastructures created and to give them meaning, celebratory opening ceremonies were organized, and accompanied by activities in each works project. Activities involving more than one work project took place in some cases, providing citizens with a more comprehensive overview of the changes in the area. Many of these activities were aimed not only at the inhabitants of the communities, but also at the rest of the city of Medellín, in order to improve the public image of these areas.

**Institutionalization processes**

The implementation of the CUPs was entrusted to the Medellín Urban Development Corporation (a municipal public company). A strategic level monitoring office management was created (under the supervision of the mayor's private secretary). This unit not only facilitates the ongoing monitoring of the projects, but also is a means for direct communication between the mayor and the EDU. It also has significant influence over the public actors involved in the project (through cabinet secretaries and managers of public institutions) to resolve the problems that arise and coordinate initiatives. The mayor's presence helped to overcome many obstacles in the implementation of the projects.

**Financing**

The cost of the north-eastern CUP was approximately 118 million dollars.

The costs of the programmes in operation:

- Commune 13: Approximately 166 million dollars
- North-western: Approximately 57 million dollars

The EDU (Medellín Urban Development Corporation) does not have its own budget, and as such it was necessary to establish agreements with the various departments responsible for their execution, and to seek funding from the private sector or through international cooperation (Spanish cooperation played a significant role in this process).

## Key results and achievements

First, a high level of institutional coordination was achieved (particularly between the EDU and the Secretariats involved) in the implementation of 290 programmes. The relationship between the population and the government was also improved (public confidence in the municipal government was improved) and significant efforts were made to improve the transparency of the entire process, overcoming the established culture of corruption and illegality.

As regards the improvement of services, universal coverage of health services was achieved for 150,000 people, as well as 98% coverage in primary and secondary education services. Programmes to protect children in vulnerable situations and to accompany veterans returning to civilian life and assistance programmes for victims of human rights violations were put in place.

Numerous cultural activities have taken place, involving not only the inhabitants of Communes 1 and 2, but also the participation of the population of the rest of Medellín. Public participation in the area has been boosted, and has been consolidated to continue with the use of the spaces and facilities that have been constructed.

An economic development centre has been created, as well as numerous economic initiatives, such as a 300% growth in business in some areas of the communes. 3,500 direct jobs have also been created by the construction projects.

125,000 square metres of public spaces and social facilities (such as libraries) have been created. There are 18 new parks (8 of the *barrios* have a park for the first time), new bridges and pedestrian crossings, and the quality of public spaces has been improved, making them factors in social cohesion, promoting community membership and care for collective facilities.

Thousands of homes have been rehabilitated, many have obtained legal status, and social facilities (such as health centres) and educational facilities (primary schools) have been built.

This entire process has entailed not only an improvement in the population's quality of life (which has improved in terms of the Human Development Index) but also the creation of new concepts of the two Communes, especially among their inhabitants, whose opinion of the place in which they live has improved.

## Main obstacles

The first difficulties that the project faced were related to the lack of trust in the work of the government among the area's population. In addition to generating initial tension, this slowed down the process, as the programme's technical team had to focus its efforts on rebuilding the t rust that had been dissipated.

Other difficulties were related to the lack of urban planning in informal settlements, which hinders the construction or restoration of public spaces. The housing restoration work had to face highly complex situations. This was not only due to the lack of regulation, (this problem goes beyond housing, as much of the population is not included in the land registry) but also because many homes were in high-risk areas (on slopes and hillsides) and in inaccessible areas.

A high degree of social decay resulting from years of State neglect and high poverty rates, and various types of violence (domestic, gender, paramilitary, related to drug trafficking, etc.). A culture of corruption had taken root among the population, in both the provision of services and the allocation of works.

**Replicability or adaptation of policy elsewhere**

This rehabilitation policy has high levels of replication, as shown by the experience in Medellín itself, where this scheme is being repeated in three areas (with another two in the start-up phase). An intervention methodology (based on practice) was created during the first process that is applicable in other contexts, provided there is a commitment from the government to carry out the agreed projects.

In fact, it is going to be adapted to other cities. In Brazil, this methodology has been one of the cornerstones in the development of the Growth Acceleration Programme (GAP)[2].

**SUMMARY**

The Comprehensive Urban Project in the North-Eastern Zone of Medellín began in 2004, shortly after the completion of the works on the Metrocable, a major investment in public mobility by the government of Medellín, which began to rebuild the relationship between Communes 1 and 2 (which occupied the lowest positions in the Human Development Index), and were mostly the result of informal settlements, with serious shortcomings in facilities and high levels of social exclusion.

The process began with the regeneration of the Medellín Urban Development Corporation (EDU), which led to the creation of inter-agency coordinating bodies that were essential for the development of the process (a key role was played by the mayor's office). One of the first tasks that accompany the socio-territorial diagnosis in the area is the rebuilding of trust in the public administrations among the people in the area (which has been damaged by years of neglect and broken promises).

At the end of this diagnosis phase, and after the improvement of relations with the communities, a specifically participatory phase of the process was launched, which began with the establishment of the Committees (a key body in the participatory process). Participation in the process took place in different phases. First, there was the phase involving diagnosis and

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[2] http://www.brasil.gov.br/pac/o-pac/.

identification of key areas by means of visits undertaken with the technical teams. This phase was followed by the design of projects in Imagination Workshops.

Once they had been designed, the teams of architects discussed the projects (conducted in a format that is understandable by the population) with the communities, in an exercise of transparency in which all the factors that determine the feasibility of the project were discussed. This transparency was maintained when awarding the work to the companies responsible for construction. Once the work began, monitoring committees were created and companies were obliged to employ people in from the community (based on criteria defined by the local Committees). After the works had been completed, celebratory inauguration activities took place to help with their appropriation and use by the population.

The results of this process do not only include improved administrative coordination and the promotion of citizens' participation. Numerous collective facilities and public spaces have also been built, educational and health facilities have been improved, and environmentally degraded areas and many homes (many of which had had to be legalized) have been rehabilitated.

This process is being repeated in four other areas in Medellín, and is planned to be rolled out in a further two areas. This shows the high degree of replicability of a comprehensive intervention methodology that faced significant obstacles such as the lack of urban planning, social and environmental degradation of the area, corruption and the lack of confidence in the government structure, as well as numerous episodes of violence.

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**Acknowledgements / Credits**

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