

# **Making Space for Peace: A Case-study of Medellín Colombia**

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## Foreword by Roger Mac Ginty and Olga Demetriou

How does the reconstruction of urban space contribute to peacebuilding in societies overcoming violence? Medellín, once infamous for its world-leading homicide rates, has been overcoming this violent legacy through means that include the redesign of urban space. This paper, incorporating primary data secured through field research on the ground explores the nuances that attend this process of ‘peace-building’ – in its most literal sense. Treading a line between, and away from both either/or approaches, Joshua Grey argues that urban reconstruction projects are neither a panacea nor a neoliberal failure. They are shaped by the daily lives of those who experience them and are shaped by them in the first place. The insights offered here are instructive to the study of urban reconstruction and the meaning of post-conflict space, as they evidence the incremental processes involved in making peace after violence concrete.

Indeed, across the social sciences, the challenge of violence in urban spaces, and the need for urban reconstruction in societies emerging from conflict, has attracted significant academic and practitioner attention in recent years. The so-called ‘spatial turn’ has sought to understand how space can be utilised to foster reconciliation as well as economic development and other attempts for societies and localities to move towards peace. Studies on urban spaces and peacebuilding have been a fertile site of interdisciplinary work drawing on the visual arts, critical urban geography, anthropology, sociology and a host of disciplines that aim to capture what Iain Sinclair called the psycho-geography of a place.

Joshua Grey’s study of Medellín, Colombia looks afresh at the concept and practice of Social Urbanism – a redevelopment and urban planning approach that promised to be people-centric and sensitive to local needs. It promised a whole-of-city approach and sought to balance competing tensions such as those between growth and liveability. Of course, Medellín is no ordinary city. It is officially home to 2.5m people (probably many more), has a population density ten times that of the City of Durham, has had haphazard urban planning, and has a legacy of association with violence and narco-crime. Given that Medellín was sometimes daubed “the most violent city on the planet”, it is not surprising that high hopes were invested in Social Urbanism, or a comprehensive planning-led approach to solve the city’s ails. There was an emphasis on participation, consultation and multi-agency approaches and many other strategies found in the ‘best practice’ toolkit.

As is often the way, the high hopes invested in Social Urbanism met with a series of setbacks – again not surprising given the context. Joshua Grey offers an even-handed analysis of the progress of the Social Urbanism experiment. Rather than following the herd, he went to Medellín to find out for himself. Based on first-hand evidence, he illustrates the importance of understanding how cities work – in his term how they are ‘laced together’ and networked. This lived experience and phenomenological approach seemed to be overlooked as projects became larger and larger and removed from people and their original purpose. Grey’s nuanced approach allows us to see the finer detail of this social experiment, the good as well as the not so good.

This Working Paper is drawn from an excellent Durham Global Security Institute (DGSi) MSc. Dissertation. It showcases student work at its best: original, relevant, rigorous, and based on original fieldwork. It has been edited by Rachael Rhoades and we are grateful to Joshua for giving permission for the dissertation to be published as a DGSi Working Paper.

## Abstract

Medellín, Colombia, in an inspiring attempt to “design-out” violence, employed a new method called Social Urbanism (SU), or radical experimentations in public space. Its effects on peacebuilding have been long proclaimed a miracle for its innovative approach to an ever-present problem: urban violence. Recently, however, new scholarship has emerged, offering a new, critical perspective on SU impact—rejecting it as a “fix all” for urban violence, and highlighting its failure to meet that “social” requirement. Scholars argue that mammoth projects tend to lose sight of the social, instead consumed with grand ideas of international acclaim for the design and implementation of that new urbanism. Indeed, when coupled with political administrations intent on reducing violence and insecurity via people-based solutions, that alienation of the social is exasperated. A critical eye is necessary and a welcome addition to a body of literature which, until recently, has proclaimed SU as a resounding triumph. However, this paper argues that, although the data collected here broadly aligns with this new perspective, the new critiques risk overlooking the *lived experience*. Preoccupied with the technical externalities of SU, the new critiques fail to give proper attention to the internal and lived experiences attributed to the new spaces created by SU. This paper offers a nuanced approach to critical analyses of SU which considers these technicalities *alongside* the subjectivities of these new spaces. This is a study of space, and how people *sculpt* and are *sculpted by* the spaces they occupy. It suggests a nuanced approach based on a detailed exploration of empirical data gathered from face-to-face interviews. Conducted in the city of Medellín, this study sheds light on the *insider* perspective, rather than adding to a body of knowledge dominated by outsiders’ interpretations.

## About the Author

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## List of Abbreviations

SU	Social Urbanism
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons

## Introduction

Cities “enable us to work and play together, and their success depends on...physical connection” (Glaeser, 2011:250). Yet many of the 3 million people migrating to the cities of the Global South every week (IOM, 2015:1) encounter a different city, one that frustrates “physical connection” between peoples—socially atomising sites that fail to fulfil their sociopetal<sup>1</sup> promise. Socio-spatial stigmas and geographies of exclusion are compounded by certain cities and regions that are convulsed by endemic insecurity and violence (Muggah, 2012:1). To take the Latin American urban context, the regional homicide rate is projected to rise from 21.7 murders per 100,000 in 2012 to 39.6 per 100,000 by 2030 (Igrapé, 2018:18).

Considering humanity is undergoing an unprecedented phase of urbanisation, it is incumbent we are “sure we can live with our creations” (Harvey, 2013:939). That the germ of violence which comprises the social sustainability of the city be pacified (UNDP, 2013). We must then consider the notion that the *city* remade *man* (Park, 1969:3). Perhaps, therefore, a cure to urban violence lies in reversing this causality, i.e., in changing the city we can make ourselves anew once again. This study is an inquiry into *space*, and how its management, the ordering and structuring of materialities of the spaces we inhabit, carry social consequence. A peacebuilding that is emplaced, scaled to urban materialities, could thus mediate the social phenomenon of violence that befalls the city.

A deductive analysis to critique this socio-spatial theoretical entailment will be informed by the experience of Medellín, Colombia. A city which sought to “design out” violence and re-knit the physical/socio fabric of the city through radical experimentations in public space (in a process branded “Social Urbanism”, hereafter **SU**). Globally eulogised within popular and policy imaginaries as the “benchmark” in what place-based interventions can do, this study draws on data collated from 31 semi-structured interviews conducted in Medellín, (June-July 2019) with actors responsible for this transition, and those living with its consequences. Thus, the study employs a qualitative research methodology designed to critically explore what the Medellín “miracle” can teach us as we unpack the socio-spatial nexus.

The study begins with a theoretical exposition (1) *On Space*. This is complemented by a chapter on (1.1) *Emplacing Peace in the Urban*, which clarifies spatial forms of exclusions and violence(s) that afflict the city. What follows is a practical exploration of how space can

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<sup>1</sup> Sociopetal – spaces that draw people into its centre.

be programmed to secure more socially-just, peaceable cities in (1.2) *Making Space for Peace*. Then an exploration of (1.3) past and current criminology of space, after which the paper offers a profile of Medellín (including the city's (2) history, and its (2.1) transformation and critiques).

This paper will then present the (3) research undertaken in the city, (3.1) its methodology, SU's (3.2) objective and (3.3) subjective impacts and its (3.4) future directions. Finishing on (4) *Lessons Learnt* that will temper and extrapolate the original research parameters. It will be found that, whilst urban peacebuilding must be cognisant of the power of space to procure social change and ameliorate violence, it is the way spaces, in their network and scale, *empower* the *people* of the city to access, manage and appropriate these spaces for themselves that is key. For it is they who will determine the future course of our urban century.

## 1. On Space

If Space is a product of social “coevalness” (Massey, 2005:99) in processual flux, systematically made and remade by the departures, arrivals and contacts formed between different human agents as well as non-human entities, we come to comprehend “the chance of space” (Massey, 2005:99). Its creative potential to generate something new through situated and unanticipated encounters of place *and* people (Sergot, 2014:340).

This is a study that speaks to the power of space to alter social relations of violence, but it is complemented by a nuanced realism that it is the people of the streets, neighbourhoods and city squares who will negotiate and clarify the “abstract concepts (*of*) democracy, fairness, and tolerance” (Bollens, 2011:227) for themselves.

This paper contends that an incorporation of both “tracks”, in a unity of space and the social, of people and place, empowers our understanding to reimagine society. For, if “there is no form without content (nor) content without form” (Lefebvre, 2017:87) then through study of the social “content” of material forms we learn of our relations with each other, as a spatial “moment within power-geometries (Massey, 2005: 131). Offering new, radical answers to that “most fundamental of political questions; how are we going to live together?” (Massey, 2003).

## 1.1 Emplacing Peace in the Urban

Cities are commonly defined by propinquity, a human proximity that can augment face-to-face dialogue, spurring exchanges that enrich shared socio-political life. They facilitate close encounters that overpower the religious, racialised, or class-based subject through mixes of space/time “when we *all* become urban subjects” (Sassen, 2015). Yet the human potential implied by the “productiveness of (*an urban*) spatiality” (Massey, 2005:94) is often lost by cities better at keeping people apart than bringing them together in space. The result is an atrophy of public space tangentially manifest by its division into pockets of gentrified, consumerist privilege saturated by an intolerance for “‘undeserving’ counter-publics<sup>2</sup>” (Pugalis, 2011:284) deemed superfluous to the needs/logics of market economics.

It is a death of urban mixity which reduces opportunities of encounter in spaces that “makes it bearable for us to live with other people... in the same world and makes it possible for them to bear with us” (Arendt, 1994:322), which undermines the resiliency of a city’s peace. Yet the trajectory of growth for cities of the *future* will mirror these spatial exclusions that gnaw at its social fabric in still more severe forms. Such urban trends are corrosive to the very core of “human development: life itself and the physical and material integrity of people” (UNDP, 2013:v).

A city that stands divided is intrinsically a violent city, wherein the “means of realisation” (Galtung, 1969:169) of full human development potentials are withheld through economic/political structural (dis-)empowerments. Therefore, what if the problem is the *city itself*? Within the malleable volatility of space lies its emancipatory potential; space, if made, can be *re-made*, through appropriation of its management, redirecting the uses/users it privileges to democratize, and making the spaces of the city more humane. A new city, one belonging to those that dwell within, thus hinges on a socio-spatial *cityzen*<sup>3</sup> right to access, occupy and *be* in urban space.

*A right to the city* presents us a compelling “pathway toward” (Lefebvre, 1977:66) a new urban sociality through a correlative remaking of our cityscapes *and ourselves*. Thus, revealing the contemporary, global relevance a “politics of the turf” (Souza, 2010) holds for an urban world, as the battleground on which peace must be won.

This case-study analysis of Medellín advances a conceptual orientation that joins space with peace, to addend a “where?” of peace to the familiar, extant, critical arraignments of the

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<sup>2</sup> i.e., the urban poor

<sup>3</sup> Shorthand for *urban* citizen.

liberal peacebuilding paradigm; what is peace and for whom is it invoked? (MacGinty & Richmond 2013;765).

## 1.2 Making Space for Peace

Before proceeding, however, it is urgent we clarify how exactly space can be made to work *for* peace. This study advances two threads of space with which the city can be sewn as arteries, knots, and veins of peace to nurture the urban body. The first being the *dignity* of space; a space of opportunities<sup>4</sup>, self-esteem, and mobility, that guarantees a right to participate in the city. *Open to all*, it grants users a voice within and through space, to proclaim *Estamos presentes*<sup>5</sup> physically and socially. As they *take* and *make* space, “social groups become public” (Mitchell, 1995:113) and announce a preliminary riposte, symbolic and concrete, to the question *Whose city is it?* (Zukin, 1995). Their answer: everyone’s.

The second, contingent on the first, being spaces of *difference*; a permeable, open space designed to maximise and normalise spontaneity and conviviality of contact between a plurality of people-types, rich *and* poor, old *and* young, “living one among many, engaged in a world that does not mirror oneself” (Sennett, 2018: 368). For there to be a social *contract* there must be social *contact* and the spaces that allow an “unfettered circulation of bodies...(*wherein*) new rhythms from the many relational possibilities” (Amin, 2008) form. Commonalities can emerge, as “great differences between neighbours” are understood and tolerated (Young, 2011:240). We can thus build spaces of *difference* and *dignity* to dwell more peaceably together (Sennett, 2018).

Yet we neglect this possibility of space. Klinenberg returns us to the basic truth of space through his construct “social infrastructure; the physical places and organisations that shape the way people interact” (Klinenberg, 2018:11). The use of infrastructure here as a proxy for space is not inadvertent but poignant, due to the circadian, “routine and familiar” (Billig, 1995:8) presence of spaces that structure our lives, we misplace their social “content”, cause, and effect.

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<sup>4</sup> Social/political/economical/cultural

<sup>5</sup> “We are present” – legendary refrain of LA urban activists.

## 1.3 A Criminology of Space

There exists a rich vein of theorists and theory that situate an enquiry of space and its dialectical tensions with social phenomena of violence and crime at the centre of analysis (Newman, 1978). Such as the early pioneers of the CPTED<sup>6</sup> school, a doctrine that posits *place*, not people-based interventions, “through manipulation of the environment where crimes occur” (Jeffrey, 1971:19), will procure more sustainable peace dividends for society.

Yet policy responses to urban violence are stubbornly contingent on “bad” people rather than “bad” spaces. It is the *physical* cues of our environment that indicate either a deficiency or surplus in *social* control which define behavioural codes—location and urban ecologies matter. *Spatial* interventions move beyond the paradigm of a narrow agential optic on violence, for the crux to violence resolution may lie not with a select *few* persons but the spaces in which we *all* collectively exist (Coley et al., 1997; Nassauer, 1988; Kuo & Sullivan, 2001:354; South et al., 2015).

However, a significant caveat to this recent line of thinking is much of this theory has been formulated, tested within, and its explanatory power contingent upon the high-income environments of the Global North (Doyle, 2018:1). Therefore, remedying the “shaky and untested” (Muggah, 2012:10) knowledgebase of current policy assessments on violence in middle-to-low-income urban environments is an urgent endeavour.

The experience of Medellín, Colombia represents a promising test-case for such a field-based engagement. A city within a country which mirrors many of the contemporary trends and struggles of our urbanising world, with 76% of its population living in cities, 20-30% of which exist in precarious settlements, having endured the highest index of urban inequality and insecurity in Latin America (Samad et al., 2012:2).

In 1991 the city was cast the “most dangerous in the world” with a rate of 381 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants and yet by 2015, it had left the cohort of the “50 most dangerous cities” with a rate of 20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants; amounting to a 90% reduction in under 30 years (Doyle, 2018:1). The process of place-based transformations in the physical form of the city is widely credited by development practitioners and organisations as responsible for its precipitous reduction in homicides. This study, through a field-based research methodology, is intended as a contribution to the literature on place-based violence reduction programs in middle-and-low-income urban contexts “still in its infancy” (Doyle, 2018:1). Yet before this

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<sup>6</sup> Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

analysis, we must consider the historical circumstances of the city that first impelled its transformation.

## 2. A Brief History of Medellín

Medellín is Colombia's second largest city with 3.7 million inhabitants (Ferrari, 2018:354) and the administrative capital of the department of Antioquia, a mountainous central, north-western region of Colombia. The city, composed of 16 *comunas*<sup>7</sup> and further sub-divided into 249 *barrios* (neighbourhoods) (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2019), is nestled within the verdant Aburrá valley of the Andean Mountain range. What results is a city defined by its vertiginous topography, embedded within a valley that is 10 km wide with a 1 km height difference from its highest peak to its lowest depression (Ferrari, 2018:354). A reference to its eminent physicality and territoriality will be key if we are to understand how this spatiality has entwined itself within the subsequent uneven development of Medellín's urban form.

Out of Medellín's total inhabitants, 50% are estimated to have arrived as IDPs by the close of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (UN-HABITAT, 2003:205). Met by a deficit of housing and infrastructure, incoming rural migrants were forced to engage in "pirate urbanisation" (*urbanización pirata*<sup>8</sup>); an informal urban fringe of self-built settlements through land invasions and illegal subdivisions that began to creep up the Aburrá creeks and slopes concentrically to the CBD<sup>9</sup> and higher socio-economic residential zones that sit at the valley's bottom (Martin, 2015:44:).

Medellín thus splintered into "two opposite 'cities' dramatically segregated by their conditions of location and geographic relief" (Echeverri, 2011:16)—the informal *Barrios populares*<sup>10</sup> towards the north-eastern/western slopes vis-à-vis the planned surface of the formal city (centre-south-east of the valley). A territorial relief most forcibly expressed by the *estratos*<sup>11</sup> (fig.1) compiled by DANE<sup>12</sup>, with the highest socioeconomic *estratos* (6)<sup>13</sup> through to the lowest *estratos* (1)<sup>14</sup> squaring neatly with the Murillo et al., (2019) spatial variability

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<sup>7</sup> Community

<sup>8</sup> City administration's term

<sup>9</sup> Central Business District

<sup>10</sup> Lower-socio-economic neighborhoods

<sup>11</sup> strata

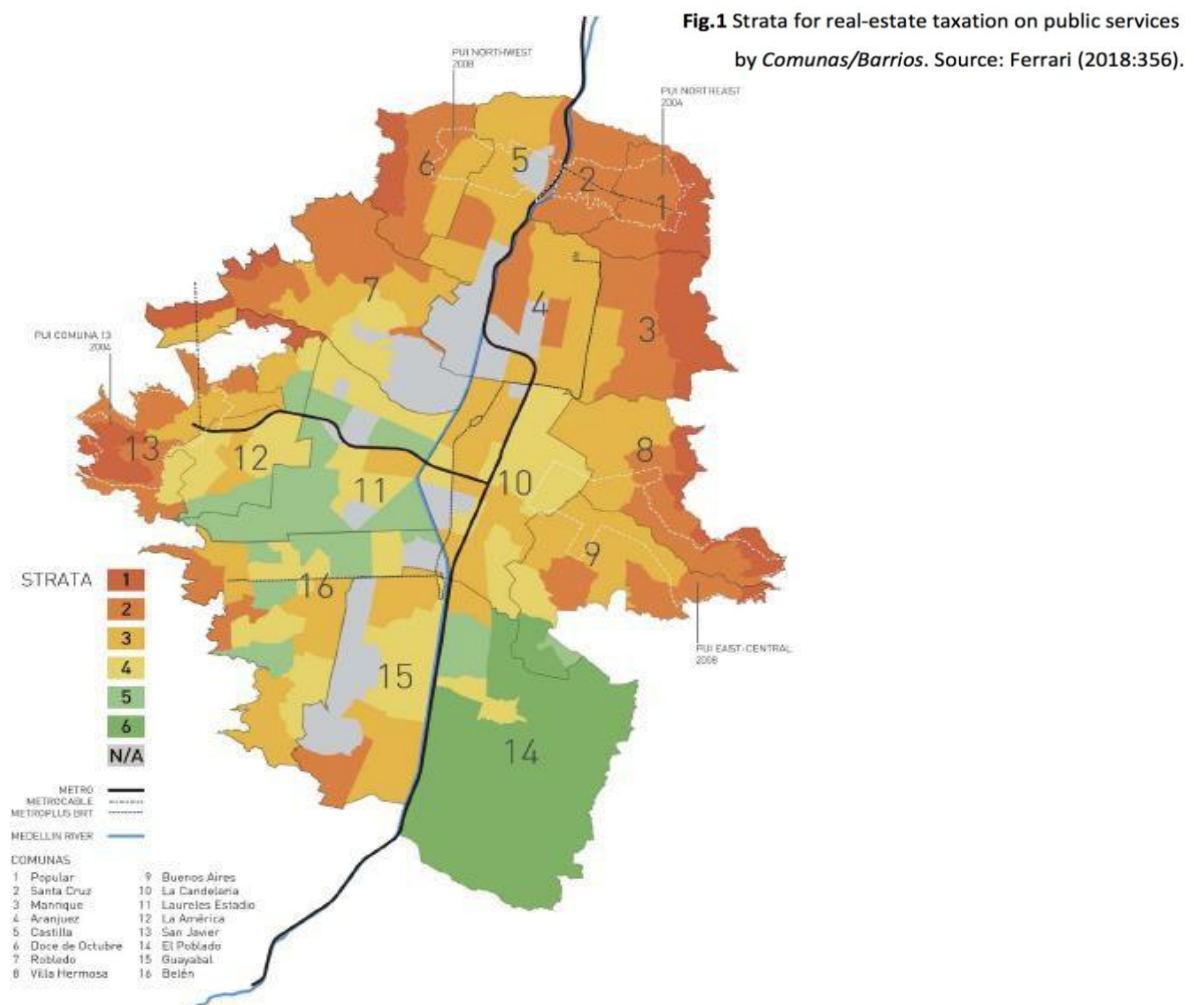
<sup>12</sup> Colombian Office for National Statistics

<sup>13</sup> Green

<sup>14</sup> Orange

analysis of QoL<sup>15</sup> indicators. Which establishes low QoL values corresponding to the outermost urban fringes (*estratos* 1), with the highest aggregate in the privileged south-eastern centres of *estratos* 6—two spatial clusters that “geographically divides the city in two parts.” (Murillo et al., 2019:1252).

If we adapt and apply Appadurai’s (1991) *ethnoscape* construct to the geographic typologies of the Medellínian *estratos* (fig.1), we see how a socio-economicscape deprives a city of its proximate contact points, of the spatial invitations by which its residents could meet diversity and negotiate a “being together of strangers” (Young, 1990: 237). Thus, physically isolating people from their inter-communal reference points as common *paisas*<sup>16</sup>, defined instead by the monosocio spaces where they reside: “If I’m *estratos* 3, that’s who I am” (Jessel, 2017).



<sup>15</sup> QoL indicators such as employment, satisfaction with goods/services, etc.

<sup>16</sup> A local name for citizens of Medellín.



The social voids between these ghettos of socio-economic homogeneity are conducive to a “talk of crime” (Caldeira, 2001); a narrative which divides the urban landscape into biased categories of evil vs. good reducing the interplay between the informal and planned surface of the city. Communities on the urban peripheries become pathologised “spaces of crime... of anomalous, polluting, dangerous qualities’ (Caldeira, 2001:79). Thus, a cartography of crime that mnemonically anchors informal dwellers as a social hazard, their fugitive presence invoked by policymakers to disqualify them of their basic rights and services of the city.

Its consequence: a normalisation of the unserved urban fringes of stigma and poverty to which these communities are condemned. A governance strategy historically deployed in Medellín, where attempts to overcome topographical challenges and integrate the mountaintop peripheries into the city were overshadowed by a prevailing policy of neglect or “urbicide” (Beall, 2007:8)—the targeted cleansing of informal urban fabric through a mobilisation of policy and army units “sent out routinely to demolish hillside settlements” (Hylton 2007, 77).

In contexts of acute socio-economic distress, a saliency of black economies where “death became a commodity,” (Alcalá, 2006:2) and state withdrawal, Medellín’s informal perimeters succumbed to regimes of chronic intra-urban violence. Crescendos in human brutality were captured by various empirical indexes, with the oft-cited 38,142 figure of 1991—the highest per capita homicide rate of any city *in history* (Sotomayor, 2018:44).

Ecologies of chronic violence divisively reshaped Medellín’s built environment. The adoption of *conjuntos cerrados* (gated communities) such as in the sector of *El Poblado* (fig.1), symbolizes the separation of upper-middle class residents, creating a disconnected urban landscape that fosters fear and excludes public engagement (Rodgers, 2012:405; Lemanski, 2004:101; Muggah, 2014; Sotomayor, 2015:389; Davis, 1992:226; Brown, 2015:39). This spatial segregation of *paisa*<sup>17</sup> life highlights how material surroundings shape social relations and reinforce unjust divisions, emphasizing the unease associated with difference and proximity – not unlike physical barriers like city walls (Rodgers, 2012:405; Caldeira, 1996:324).

The walls of the *conjuntos cerrados* development craze undermined the idea of social equality, threatening the cohesion of the city’s *socio-economicscape* (Brown, 2015). Yet if this represented Medellín’s nadir at the close of the 1990s, so too was it the city’s *inflection point*.

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<sup>17</sup> A demonym for people who hail from Medellín.

## 2.1 Social Urbanism™: A Medellin Miracle?

SU is shorthand for an urban transformation model implemented by a succession of reformist mayors<sup>18</sup>, while surrounded by a multidisciplinary coalition<sup>19</sup> of the semi-autonomous municipal faculty of EDU<sup>20</sup>. Multi-stakeholder pioneers of the *Proyectos Urbanos Integrales* (PUI)<sup>21</sup>, first introduced in 2004 as a planning and development instrument, evolved from, in the words of the General Manager of the EDU<sup>22</sup>, Alejandro Echeverri, “a deep understanding of the territory” (Echeverri, 2011:100). It sought to intervene at the socio-spatial margins of the northern, western, and eastern slopes of the *estratos* (fig.1)—areas geo-analytically prioritised for their elevated poverty and violence indexes in a methodology which can be briefly contoured into three components.

The first entails injecting public space<sup>23</sup> into the cramped *barrios* of the city’s frayed edges. Such spaces are known for their iconic monumentality of form, scale and material, given expression in Fajardo’s famous axiom, “the most beautiful for the most humble” (Fajardo, 2007). For example, between 2004-2011, *comuna* 13 (fig. 1 central, western-highlands) received the San-Javier Library Park, an outdoor escalator, new schools, sports fields, pocket parks and the *metrocable* system (Dolan, 2018:19). The latter of which brings us to the second methodological strand of SU; urban mobility interventions such as the aerial cable-car public transit system—the first application of cable technology to high-pitch gradient, low-income urban environments (Brand, 2011:2).

Enfranchising informal dwellers once previously isolated by challenging topographies of access, SU is thus defined by a careful articulation of structures, as in the relational *comuna* 1 (fig.1) clustering of the España Public Library, School Antonio Derka, and Santo Domingo *metrocable* station. Yet this betrays a cosmology of urban development conceived holistically as a *system*, “nodes or channels for communication between communities” (Guzman, 2018:93) rather than merely a series of isolated, “starchitecture” (Ponzini, 2014) acupuncture points in the cityscape.

Crucial to such an endeavour is the third component of SU: its participatory methodology. It is guaranteed by tight collaborative processes of community-based *Taller de Imaginarios* (Imaginary Workshops) in which *cityzens* are made the “active subjects in the

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<sup>18</sup> 2004-2007 Sergio Fajardo/2008-2011 Alonso Salazar/2012-2015 Anubal Gaviria

<sup>19</sup> Architects/sociologists/planners/civil engineers etc.

<sup>20</sup> Urban Development Corporation

<sup>21</sup> Urban-Integral-Projects.

<sup>22</sup> 2004-2005

<sup>23</sup> Social infrastructures such as Library-parks, sport, community centres etc.

conception and construction of the neighbourhood upgrading” (Alcadía de Medellín, 2014:1). For example, a “participatory shift” (Pearce, 2010) reflected by democratic approaches to local knowledge in the formulation of the JALs<sup>24</sup>—popularly elected fora of community delegate-representatives—who manage the 5% of municipal funds ringfenced through participatory budgeting (Guerrero, 2011). SU, in its philosophy of urban development, thus aspires towards empowering “people to stitch it back together themselves” (Warnock-Smith, 2016).

SU harnesses space as a peacebuilding tool through programmatic sensitivity to spatial typologies of the Medellínian *socioeconomicscape*, “mapping different spaces... understanding how deeply divided (the) city is and where peace can ‘take place’” (Björkdahl, 2013:218). It is based upon a *social*<sup>25</sup> construction of the habitat as guarantee of “community-oriented sustainable development” (Hajdarowicz, 2018:3). Thus, a move towards acceptance of informality and its people to be integrated with, not shunned from, the planned surface of the city through a cultivation of connective spatial sinews and flows.

PUIs as a paradigm change that spatially refashioned “strategic sectors of poorly consolidated neighbourhoods” (Echeverri, 2011:100), to give them “New Skin”<sup>26</sup>(Colak, 2015) and social reality, occupy a privileged place in the policy imaginaries of organisations/researchers of the global development community. They drew similar attention from researchers, such as the Cerdá et al., (2012) analysis which found declines in homicides to be 66% greater in intervention neighbourhoods (PUI sites) than control neighbourhoods, and Muggah’s (2015:30) eulogy to Medellín as a “most stunning case... (in) how to design-out crime”. To borrow Echeverri’s analogy, SU charged Medellín with new reputational valence, “from being ‘uninhabitable’ to today being the hip and trendy belle of the ball” (Echeverri, 2011:103).

Yet the problem with paradigms is their propensity to epistemic hegemony. A fresh critical “turn” by a literature repels the paradigmatic orthodoxies of SU as spatial elixir to urban violence, as Colak queries “is the ‘new skin’ only ‘skin’ deep?” (2015:207). Brand also cites<sup>27</sup> how the *metrocable* “fit(s) uncomfortably into local everyday routines” (Brand, 2013:14), as sign that SU is more “spectacle”, unconcerned with the “directly lived” experiences of the *barrios*. This represents the “fetishisation of

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<sup>24</sup> *Juntas Administradoras Locales*

<sup>25</sup> Hence the “social” in SU.

<sup>26</sup> A popular refrain of Mayor Salazar.

<sup>27</sup> Also underwhelming performances of neighborhood QoL/HDI quotients around *metrocable* catchment areas.

the (SU) architectural object” (Brand, 2013:11) a mimicry of Debord’s “degradation of *being... into appearing*” (1994:120).

SU and its ostentation is thus decried as a “technology of image-diffusion” (Debord, 1994:74), imbricated by the city’s neoliberal developmental agenda.<sup>28</sup> Scholars point to a lack of *causal* linkages between SU and violence reduction (Doyle, 2018:14), and the continuation of violence through non-lethal, “hidden crisis” modalities of intra-urban forced displacement or GBV (Colak, 2015; Reimerink, 2018). Yet the uni-vocal, celebratory SU narrative obscures its dark antecedents and omits these victims claimed by a violent “production of the space of the urban miracle” (Humphrey, 2017:171).

That narrative was “strained... its ‘truth effects’ weakened” (Brand, 2013:1) by this trend in scholarship dedicated to recover the “multiple readings of the city” (Naef, 2016:188), and provided the origin impetus which foregrounds this paper’s research parameters. If Medellín is to be an urban model for export, we need to be sure it works. An endeavour realisable only through “time spent *in* Medellín” and its spaces, by “taking a context-specific approach and collecting data-on-the-ground” (Doyle, 2018:14).

### **3. SU in the field: Urban Myth or Miracle?**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

The presented research is product of a month-long, field-based engagement, with the space of Medellín at the local-level, undertaken between June-July 2019. A prior content-analysis of policy/academic literature and popular/media coverage was undertaken to identify potential key informants for in-depth interviews with qualitative insights on SU, in calculation that face-to-face dynamics would prove most conducive to its *critical* interrogation. Through purposive sampling techniques, local actors drawn from a variety of sectors, such as academics, elected municipal officials, private practitioners (architects, planning consultants etc.), and NGOs were strategically targeted. Complemented by a snowball sampling technique of chain-referrals to reduce sampling bias (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

To further diversify the sampling base, the researcher, through site visits, interviewed residents as they used/managed a “flag-ship” SU project *in situ* (*La Ladera Biblioteca, comuna* 8), taking care to reflect variety in age, gender and residency of *estratos* 1-6. Giving a final total of 31 interviews a more detailed (by general profile) breakdown of which can be found as

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<sup>28</sup> Of labour flexibilised, low-productivity service economies

an appendix. All interviews followed a semi-structured format, its central question rubric conditioned by enquiry into a social-space nexus. Yet affording room for open-ended conversations, that might venture off the course of hyper-rehearsed scripts so stubbornly associated with the SU “miracle” (Schultze & Avital, 2010:4). Data was also complemented by exchanges over Skype once the fieldwork period ended. Finally, full, informed consent was attained, and anonymity granted, to give participants the confidence to make the off-script, discursive detours necessary if this study is to fulfil its remit as a *critical* contribution to what SU can teach us vis-à-vis *emplaced* peace. What follows is a cross-section of select quotes representative of the qualitative outcomes which will enrich a general social-space theory.

### 3.2 SU: Its Technical Merits and Material Impacts

After commencing with biographical questions to deduce an individual’s life trajectory, the first priority of the interviews was to engage with spectacular notions of the skin-deep, show-room externalities to SU as elaborated by the new critical élan. Leading with studies (*inter alia* Brand, 2013; Reimerink, 2018) that variously malign the *comuna* 13 escalator/*metro cable* for a poor articulation to everyday saliences of local economy and mobility patterns<sup>29</sup>, the responses broadly align with these critiques of SU-as-spectacle. An academic researcher on urban mobility accepts the escalators as “just an anecdote, they are so small in a specific place” (respondent 3) whilst a knowledge management professional of the ACI<sup>30</sup> characterises them *first* as a “new tourist reference” (respondent 25).

Exploring appraisals of SU as a skin-change yet skin-deep, an urban planner (respondent 2) of the NGO *Build Change*<sup>31</sup>, draws attention to a recent geo-morphological vulnerability assessment and its proposals that 20% of all housing stock is vulnerable to total structural failure in the event of soil saturated/earthquake-induced landslides (Acevedo et al., 2019:20). The impending threat to human life this figure entails is expressed through a cosmetics analogy to communicate the *hollowness* of SU and its “amazing but specific projects” such as the signature *Biblioteca de España* that fails to extend “deep in the *comuna*... inside there’s nothing as good as you see outside” (respondent 2). This is a theme of an SU “shell” which neglects problems at its urban core, similarly conveyed by a key architect when

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<sup>29</sup> The latter averaging less than 10% of total journeys by catchment-area (Brand, 2011:655).

<sup>30</sup> ACI – a decentralised public-private PR agency that internationally markets “*el modelo Medellín*” (respondent 25).

<sup>31</sup> Its mission to construct disaster-resistant homes/infrastructures (Build Change, 2019).

discussing their work on the project, Jardín Botánico, showpiece of Medellín's revitalised centre, north:

If I see the Botanical Garden... these were projects of very large scale... (yet projects) cannot stay at that large scale, it has to have interventions at small scales that sow into the different layers of the city. Social Urbanism has been working on the big structures of the city, big transportation, public space... but I believe that housing builds up 2/3 of the city and if housing is not solved under this idea of *social*<sup>32</sup> urbanism... that's the biggest loss we have" (respondent 27).

Yet this realism of a shallow SU skin is often accompanied by a fierce defence of these "small islands within the city" (respondent 27). This is illustrated by the defiant ripostes to questions which asks respondents to assess the successes and/or failures of SU. It is telling, for example, that a high-level staff member of *Build Change*, an individual whose professional career intersects with perhaps *the* major failing of SU (a deficit of quality social housing) can honestly acknowledge these shortcomings, "yes, people are happy but not safe" (respondent 2). Yet they shake their head at the word "failure", dissociating it from SU, as if we are still in a surplus of good.

Respondent 3 displayed a defiance during discussions of the *Biblioteca de España*, one of the initial SU "jewels", an architecturally Icarian library-park, perched discordantly astride the *Santo Domingo* hills (*comuna* 1). In material mimicry of "the irregular mountain contours...a folded building cut like mountains... in form and space" that seeks to decontextualise the individual from *comuna* poverty/past (Mazzanti, 2008). Yet now known as Medellín's "White Elephant", indefinitely closed after discovery of serious structural defects, the symbology of a SU prestige project scaffolded and swathed in plastic is rationalised in this manner:

the kids that grew up around there, some of them must have gone to the library more than once, one of them must have found a book that inspired him... Maybe, it doesn't have to be so extravagant. It could be a more modest library, but... after all, you do need a flagship of the things you do, because that symbolism, in a certain sense, helps... (respondent 3).

This paradox to SU, at once convulsed by serious mechanic/practical failings yet still existing vibrantly on a symbolic/allegorical plane, is conveyed in conversation with an eminent SU architect (respondent 4) who worked on the *Orquideorama*, focal point to *Jardín Botánico*. This comes from a vehement critic of technically wrong-headed SU interventions, "in the last years, most of it has been pretty much wrong." They illustrate their contention with the example of the 2015 *Parque del Rio* project; a venture which aims to rearticulate the city's relation with

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<sup>32</sup> Emphasis not mine.

the waterway that bisects it (formerly fenced in by two highways), by recovering pedestrian possibilities for an approach/traversal of the river (Landezine, 2018). A river, or an aqua/biotic corridor of flora/fauna characterised by former director of City Planning (respondent 11) as a new ecological axis of “connectivity, east-west, west-east”.

Yet the promise of this project is tempered by respondent 4’s assertions that technically, *Parque del Rio* is case of “the wrong timing, wrong location, wrong strategy” that connects two banks upon which “nobody lives... (for) it’s the administrative centre, *plaza mayor*.” Contending instead that less glamorous, lower-key yet higher-impact interventions could have been made at the many ravines: “invisible borders” which crenelate the relief of the Aburrá slopes. They argue that “you can incentivate<sup>33</sup>... (as) fluid corridors down to the city. If you connect the ravines... (you) connect the neighbourhoods” (respondent 4). Whilst the PDR<sup>34</sup> project may be scorned as “silly gardens entering into the city centre with no purpose at all” there is a concession that nevertheless “it’s great that it’s happening... I’d rather walk on a street that takes you to the city centre that is full of trees and plants, of course.”

It becomes clear that analysis must proceed to deeper, more phenomenological layers of understanding, as respondent 4 acknowledges, “we have to divide the discussion as a technical view or as a citizen”.

### 3.3 Semiotics of Space as Dignity

SU analyses must move beyond narrow “technical points of view” (respondent 4) and instead venture to more expansive conceptual territories. That can accommodate the semiotics overlaying space, conditioning social-worlds and “making symbolic use of its objects” (Lefebvre, 1991:39). Without this transition, we lose a (*social*) conception of space as it is *lived* (Lefebvre, 1991), i.e., the “creative, poetic act” (Schmid, 2008:33) of dwelling in spaces invested with symbolism and meaning, upon which (new?) social realities hinge, as its cause and consequence. As noted by a PR<sup>35</sup> consultant who worked on the systematization and exposition of SU projects on behalf of the IDB<sup>36</sup>, who alludes to the “intentional work of symbols and signs” that went into SU, “so people could change their mindset and start perceiving the city in ways they haven’t before, in ways that are not so socially fragmented.”

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<sup>33</sup> (*sic*)

<sup>34</sup> *Parque del Rio*

<sup>35</sup> Public-Relations, Respondent 30

<sup>36</sup> Inter-American Development Bank

Clarifying the profound social meanings that inhere within the seemingly banal material arrangements of metro carriages, they note:

...have you seen how the banks (of seats) are facing each other and not little compartments of two seats by two seats in front of each other? It was for people to look into the eye of each other, to be able to look outside the window and recognise the city, especially the north, because, in the beginning people said, 'why don't we build walls?... So, we don't have to deal with these views of poverty'. No, we're not doing that, on the contrary we're facing them. (Respondent 30).

A semiotic praxis of SU, “changing symbols... making new meanings” extends to the ostensibly innocuous nomenclature of its projects. For example, the technical name of the struts along which the *metro cable* is strung was originally “tower”, the term was discarded due to memorial connotations in “collective cultures... of the energy towers that the guerrillas used to bomb”. To avoid a lexical “invitation” to terror, they replaced tower with *pílon*, sharing the same name and sacrosanct connotations with the apparatus historically used to prepare *arepas*<sup>37</sup>, for there “is nothing more sacred than a grandmother piling the corn for making arepas” (respondent 30). Distinct spatial nomenclatures deployed to “evoke something different, to make a different imaginary” that bleeds into social behaviours *in spaces* thus “attached to a meaning that is so sacred... perhaps if they had kept the name tower, history would be different” (respondent 30).

A critical literature which confines analysis along a tight, technocratic rubric loses these semantic (thus *social*) textures of SU space. We must burrow deeper into the subjectivities of SU *along with* its technicalities, examining what it *means*, not just what it does operatively, or else our analysis misses something. It neglects, for example, SU as a *dignifying* spatial praxis, the spectacle of its “architecture send(ing) an important political message... when you go to the poorest neighbourhood and build the city’s most beautiful building, that gives a sense of dignity” (Fajardo in Fukuyama, 2011).

Indeed, an architect—who is now in private practice but who worked under Fajardo to implement the *PUI* of *comuna 1* (*fig.1*)—defines SU as an endeavour to “talk with the people and understand their disconnection... to show that they are here, that they exist”, thus with “change in the skin” came “change in the culture of the city” (respondent 24). The *metro cable* capsules that afford panoramic views of the informal surfaces, are instrument and allegory of a state resolve to *face* its outlying communities, to overcome a *paisa*<sup>38</sup> binary of “two cities in one... (and) connect people” (respondent 24). These in-your-face SU architectures belie a more subtle design intelligence of how a city “turned

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<sup>37</sup> A flat disc of maize dough, a staple in Columbian cuisine made traditionally with the *pílon*.

<sup>38</sup> A term for residents of Medellín.



around and acknowledged them as citizens, and as people” (respondent 3). For one urban designer who sits on the city’s municipal council, a “contemplation of the spectacle” (Debord, 1994:11) is thus intimately bound to a spatial,

Recognition of dignity... you don’t have to make something ugly just because the neighbourhood is dangerous or poor... it’s a library<sup>39</sup>, OK, but it’s something more, it creates an impact, visually, and spiritually, for the people... they stopped feeling like they were the pariah, like the sickness of the city and they started feeling proud of their territories... dignified by these beautiful interventions (respondent 12).

This advances an “aesthetic justice” (Mattila, 2002) of the spectacular as a *two-way* dialectic—yes, implicated by place-branding logics, but also by an aspiration that “everybody deserves to have access to beautiful spaces... (*based on*) collective constructions, the co-creation with the communities” (respondent 19<sup>40</sup>). We are thus impelled to reorient the critical “turn”, along with its rash presumptions of the SU spectacle as if *only* configured to externalised tourist economies or a middle-class-elite gaze of the formal city which fails to consider how the spectacle *rebounds* into the “psyche of the people who live in the places where these projects are carried out” (respondent 3). For SU is not uni-directional, rather, as “neighbourhood(s) connected to the city, the city connected to them” to disrupt stigmas of marginality. As one respondent notes,

“I had never gone to Santo Domingo<sup>41</sup> for me it was like hell on Earth, it was in my city but far away and scary... (but SU) attracts attention, it attracts people... passing from being the most dangerous neighbourhood in the world to receive tourists from around the world, there’s a story behind there, something strong (respondent 12).

Yet the new critical “turn”, for all the nuance and caveat it adds to the SU miracle narrative, too often suppresses the saliencies of a self-esteem factor to the *paisa* experience, “the people feel really proud of belonging to this city” (respondent 2). Without engaging a phenomenology or semiotics of space, it risks falling prey to the same accusations with which it charges SU, i.e., perverse tendencies of “outsiders (to) define the sense of place of insiders who are informed what their recognizably distinct local identity might be” (Ashworth in Naef, 2018). More shades of grey, than a black-and-white success or failure, we are thus impelled to study SU spaces bottom-up; *as they are lived* by the people in their daily spatial routines and negotiations.

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<sup>39</sup> Of *comuna* 1

<sup>40</sup> Former senior figure of the EPM (public-utilities company of Medellín, 30% of its profits are ringfenced for SU projects).

<sup>41</sup> *Comuna* 1

### 3.4 Spaces of Difference: “little by little we begin to mix<sup>42</sup>”

The first priority of the study is therefore to conduct an *in-situ* analysis of SU “spaces created in the previously ‘invisible’ areas (of) the perimeter” (respondent 18<sup>43</sup>). *La Ladera Biblioteca*<sup>44</sup> (fig.2) is the locale selected for site-visit, due to the way it matches this profile but also an interest in the library *as* space out-of-sync to prevailing neo-liberal *zeitgeists*; a market-driven “retreat into (*spatial*) privatism” (Kohn, 2004:97), behind “consumership” paywalls<sup>45</sup> (Krahmann, 2008:379). Libraries, free and open to *all*, remain a last bastion as a space “saturated with strangers” (Klinenberg, 2018:57), with their “simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives... in which the common world presents itself” (Arendt, 1994:52). They offer sociabilities of difference that enrich democratic behaviours/civic cultures necessary to “imagine one another as citizens” (Kohn, 2004:159). Making a library a crucial locus of study in cities transitioning from violence such as Medellín.

An appraisal of *La Ladera’s* built form corroborates comments provided by an architect of the project, who explains the design rational of its three pods as an “architectural approach (that) allows greater flexibility and autonomy in use... since each volume can operate independently” yet is commonly “integrated by a lower platform” of more public-oriented space (fig.2) (respondent 26). The “three volumes” of the library—training units/classrooms and auditorium betraying a deft design logic, that navigates the tension between encouraging discrete use-streams<sup>46</sup> whilst ensuring the “divided architectural program”—is brought back together to support opportunities of encounter. A lesson on how spaces (*ville*) can be planned and designed to contour the relations that develop in and around them (*cit *) i.e., how we *build* shapes how we  *dwell* (Sennett, 2018).

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<sup>42</sup> Respondent 3

<sup>43</sup> An urban mobility expert

<sup>44</sup> *Comuna 8* (fig.1 centre, east hillsides).

<sup>45</sup> i.e. those who can afford to frequent “third” spaces (Oldenburg, 1999) Starbucks etc.

<sup>46</sup> i.e., diverse activities (thus maximum community appropriation).

**Fig.2** *La Ladera Biblioteca*.  
Source: (Carmona, 2019).



Frigid, bare monocultures of form “fit one kind of person, but not others,” whereas the elastic *La Ladera* spaces of “mixed forms and uses invite mixed users” (Sennett, 2018:10) and bespeaks of a new tolerant, inclusive social reality whose “underpinning is spatial” (Lefebvre, 1991:404). We are impelled to focus on the *users* of these spaces, a unity of subject *with* object, for, as the socio-spatial nexus implies, it “takes two to know one” (Bateson, 1993). It would be remiss, for example, to omit from analysis the human ingenuity that has capitalised on *La Ladera*’s “spatiology” (Lefebvre, 1991). For it is the people *within La Ladera* that make its space. One content curator<sup>47</sup> defines her role as providing “empty space for the citizens” into which they pour their own meanings, alluding to one successfully user-led cultural programme entitled *Afro-Dance* sessions, which “touched a lot of communities... with an alternative symbology and visualisation of a population that has been<sup>48</sup> always a minority.”

It is a co-relative innovation of space *and* its people that endows *La Ladera* with its “collective effervescence” (Durkheim, [1912]2012:82). Speaking to *La Ladera*’s socio-cultural manager<sup>49</sup>, the respondent depicts a constant search to “find the clubs, strategies... (*and*) workshops” that can have an “impact in *every* person that visits this place”. From *Pequeños Pasos* (Little Steps), an early years’ reading club to *Lectores Apasionados* (Passionate Readers) for people with disabilities in session during the interview, the ambition, characterised by a digital mediations<sup>50</sup> director, is to draw a:

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<sup>47</sup> Respondent 13

<sup>48</sup> (*sic*)

<sup>49</sup> Respondent 5

<sup>50</sup> Respondent 6

diverse people... (who can) develop a sense of belonging, that they don't just see this just as a big building but a place where they can come and have an encounter... (to) get closer to the community and get them closer to the space (respondent 6).

One programme, *Bibliogamers*, in which young members of the community congregate in *La Ladera's* space to play the game *League of Legends*, is an eloquent lesson on intimate community appropriations of place—how to “make those spaces *theirs*.”<sup>51</sup> As respondent 6 reflects on the “kids who used to come here just to get free WIFI for a couple of hours... (*yet*) now they are doing something that they like, that gets them as a group”. For a young adult and participant of the programme, it's an opportunity to “discuss different character (*narratives*)” and a “chance to interact, not only with people you don't know but with people that might think in a different way... that's a good way to learn their point of view” (respondent 7).

Through adept social-space programming, we see how *La Ladera* is coded as a spatial focus for what Massey terms a “throwntogetherness” (2005:140). That is, spaces which present us with alterity, novelty and an “unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now” (2005:140). It is a situated “meeting of the previously unrelated” (Massey, 2005:71) to mend *paisa* social-webs atomized by violence/socio-economic polarity. Spatial concomitances of difference, with “strangers; people whose bodies are different, whose styles are different, who make different sounds (etc.)” (Klinenberg, 2018:57), that activate “familiar links”<sup>52</sup> of tolerance, a social bridging (Putnam, 2007) of ties through which a new urban body politic can coalesce. As a *La Ladera* patron, taking advantage of the WIFI for an adult study course affirms, “people (become) like family, like brothers, they get closer to each other thanks to spaces like this” (respondent 8).

Conversations with a social leader who sits on the *Comuna 8 JAL*<sup>53</sup>, laying some of *La Ladera's* first stones, recalls the original site *La Ladera* now occupies as a,

very *lonely*, violent place, *full of grass*<sup>54</sup>, people were scared of the area, they couldn't come here... (*but through*) change in the territory, this space represented a transition from that fear to hope... (respondent 9).

As the excerpt above evinces, spaces are safer when they are “teeming with life and adventure” (Jacobs, 1967:85)—with people. SU spaces of difference can thus be split into one of two functions. The *first* is its function as a “space for encounters” (respondent 10), as loci wherein people can recover confidence *in each other*. Co-constituted by its

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<sup>51</sup> Respondent 12

<sup>52</sup> Respondent 6

<sup>53</sup> Community-Action-Boards (USCIS, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Branas et al., literature earlier articulated on abandoned lots/crime. Emphasis mine

*second* function: to “multiply and interconnect those actions (*of*) the common life of the people through... schools, library and parks” (Mendoza, 2016) that recover confidence in the *spaces* of the city. *La Ladera* is an epitaph to both, for its patrons “now have that connection (*but also*) appropriation of that territory they thought was a lost cause” (respondent 6).

Whilst an *in-situ* optic has thus contoured a safe meeting space on the *comuna* 8 landscape, we must now ask, what of the higher *estratos* communities situated at the valley floor? *La Ladera* may be a “daily place to gather” (respondent 3) for the people of *comuna* 8 but will do little to bind *socioeconomicscape* fragments of the distressed slopes and privileged plains of the *Aburrá* high/low-lands. Nor will it defeat the inequities of a social taxonomy which rely on logics of “how much you have and how much I don’t... how do you deactivate a social bomb that’s about income?” (respondent 4). The UVA project of *El Tesoro*<sup>55</sup> situated in an elite *estratos* 6 neighbourhood,<sup>56</sup> adjoined by the city’s most exclusive mall whilst bordered by a ring of lower-income *estratos* 1, 2 and 3 communities, suggests the latter question is not necessarily rhetorical. A small-scale yet creative response to community deficits in public space (4m<sup>2</sup>/per resident) (Bakker, 2016), the project sought to repurpose empty, fenced lots around a water tank into a public unit of space.<sup>57</sup>

Two former high-level executives of EPM<sup>58</sup> describe the “tonnes of opposition” the project initially encountered by a neighbouring *El Poblado* elite who “didn’t want this space” (respondent 19). As they fell back on the familiar, well-rehearsed social tropes/stigmas held of lower *estratos*, “they would say, ‘we don’t want our neighbourhood filled with *taxistas*<sup>59</sup> and marijuana” (respondent 20). Yet through dialogues of co-design (Imaginary Workshops), they became a “part of the dream... that we should bring down the fences and promote interaction if we wanted to become a more sustainable community” (respondent 19). Offering new socio-spatial possibilities to the gated-community pillboxes or claustrophobic mall interiors to which elite *El Poblado* collective life had been confined, we may “be different but we can coexist in one same space” (respondent 20).

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<sup>55</sup> UVA: (*Unidad de Vida Articulada*) “link of life”.

<sup>56</sup> Strata 6: *El Poblado* (fig.1 south, east)

<sup>57</sup> Complete with park, workshop classrooms, ICT rooms, health services and library.

<sup>58</sup> EPM: the public utilities company that implemented UVA. Respondents 19&20.

<sup>59</sup> Taxi drivers

The UVA landscape thus recast physical interrupters (hard infrastructure<sup>60</sup>) into softer, “socio-technical” (Mollard, 2015) urban scenarios of assembly, wherein citizens can negotiate the terms of their connectivity (Massey, 2005:153). This is exemplified by *Los Guardianes de la UVA*<sup>61</sup>, a forum for citizens which sets common standards of use which mediates “how to appropriate and take care of the space” (respondent 20). UVA provides a schema of how to make a city scaled to life, to “make an excuse of an edge, a corner”<sup>62</sup> and inject *places to gather* into dense, urban entanglements where there are none. Spaces,

where the city can refind itself and see that we’re all citizens of the same city – that it’s ok for the rich to be close to the poor... stereotypes that we (*can*) let go of. We haven't gotten there yet but it’s possible to get there<sup>63</sup> (respondent 3).

Yet the promise of the UVA project is undercut by a palpable sense of malaise that inflects perceptions of the SU machine. If we are to learn anything of SU therefore, we must also explore its *future* direction.

### 3.5 S/U and Its Disconnects from the Social

A large cross-section of respondents perceive a corruption to SU values by an administration under the mayoral stewardship<sup>64</sup> of Federico Gutiérrez in its lurch back to people-based, *manu dura* rubrics of crime prevention. Qualitative data aligns neatly with Sotomayor’s critical analysis of the departure from core SU tenets by a mayoralty of “punitive securitisation measures over comprehensive social development” (Sotomayor, 2018:51). Respondent 30<sup>65</sup> alludes to Gutiérrez’s resort to a “sheriff-style security,” engaging in *amarillismo* (tabloid, sensationalist) photo-op stunts. For example, in the 2019 demolition of the Monaco residence (formerly of Pablo Escobar), vowing “this symbol of illegality, of evil, will be brought to the ground” (Gutiérrez in Casey, 2018). Politicians and VIPs were convened to witness the demolition which, for some, are implicated in the same conspicuous “culture of the gangster”<sup>66</sup> it sought to repudiate.

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<sup>60</sup> i.e., control systems of transport, utilities, communications etc.

<sup>61</sup> Guardians of the UVA

<sup>62</sup> Professionally engaged in knowledge systems/PR.

<sup>63</sup> In reference to UVA.

<sup>64</sup> (2016-)

<sup>65</sup> Former municipal employee.

<sup>66</sup> Respondent 30

Thus, the SU project stalls under an administration which spurns security as an “*integral*”<sup>67</sup> preventive policy that invests in people to have other possibilities of life” (respondent 30). Hard security budgets swell, with new acquisitions of defensive technologies—helicopters “to supervise the air and look for gangsters” (respondent 30) or the 1,000 soldiers redeployed to neighbourhoods of *comuna* 1 (Albaladejo, 2018). It is telling, for example, that an interview with three members<sup>68</sup> of the *Secretariat of Social Inclusion and Human Rights*, a municipal office for the *reduction* of discriminatory practices (ACM, 2019), repeatedly alludes, unprompted, to issues of security and the presence of “counter-publics” (Pugalis, 2018). Unscripted detours on “problems” which “transcend public space” (respondent 21), that zero in on the crimes of street hawkers, Venezuelan refugees or homeless people:

(*crime*) does not depend if the space is beautiful or clean. It depends on the people who want to consume and sell drugs... what makes the place safe is the people in the space (respondent 23).

Although we may sympathise with the statement “public spaces are nothing without the people”<sup>69</sup>, we must explore its intents. For it is one laced with distrust, repressive consequence, and betrays the neurotic saliency of people-based security optics. A *bad hombre* neurosis which bleeds into perceptions of falling security, as captured by annual resident surveys registering a drop from 47% in 2017 to 41% in 2018 (Como Vamos, 2019), further unfixes the *paisan socioeconomicscape*—a “talk of crime” that alienates population groups rather than invites them into society. As situated stigmas<sup>70</sup> of the periphery are re-emboldened, the elite migrate to new gated-community developments in the mountains *beyond* the *Aburrá* valley basin.

An elite opt-out of society that transcends even Caldeira’s “fortified enclave” (1996) in its extremity. Mountain fortified suburbias that rely on models of hyper-mobility; a “capacity to escape, to disengage, to *be elsewhere*” (Bauman, 2000:120). Freedoms of an elite extraterritoriality built upon the *unfreedoms* of those confined to the *barrios*, their “immobility, boundedness to the ground” (Bauman, 2000:120) meaning they must endure the pollution that chokes the *Aburrá* as the ninth most polluted Latin-American city by ambient air quality (WHO, 2018). Inequalities of mobility “winners and losers” (Bauman, 2000:92) expressed cogently by one academic:

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<sup>67</sup> Holistic

<sup>68</sup> Respondents 21, 22, and 23

<sup>69</sup> Respondent 23

<sup>70</sup> As seats of “poverty, youth (young men), violence, delinquency” (Torres, 2018:6).

it is taking a part of our lives... people with the lowest incomes are the bulk of the population but the people with the highest incomes are the bulk of the congestion and both things are completely suffocating the city (respondent 2).

In the hyper-securitised “bunkerisation” (Duffield, 2012) of the *paisa* cityscape, it seems a major SU lesson is being lost, “that the opposite of insecurity is not security<sup>71</sup>...the opposite of insecurity is *coexistence*” (Melguizo, 2012:1). Yet the gravest allegation that respondents frequently level<sup>72</sup> at the SU project is its split from the *social*, in a betrayal of its bottom-up, participatory planning praxis. One architect<sup>73</sup> characterises community participation as a veneer, merely a “checklist and not relevant information to guide urban design.” Whilst a seminal SU architect (respondent 4) reserves their most acerbic critique for the EDU, “they claim they do social participation, (*but*) they just show them what they already have in mind and do whatever they want. That’s a rotten apple”.

The striking uniformity of this disenchantment with the SU project is supported by a burgeoning critical literature on how megaprojects, cut from their social tethers, have become “as much a threat to (*residents*) as the armed actors in the territory” (Colak, 2015:218). Anguelovski’s (2018; 2019) work on the EDU *Cinturón Verde* (Green Belt) pilot project of *comuna* 8 (an anti-sprawl, greened, perimeter) is one example. Its climate resilience, “smart” urbanism discourses a trojan horse for land grabs and a managerial, top-down contempt for vernacular preferences and imaginaries of flora, fauna, and landscape (Anguelovski, 2019:152). Asked about this project a councillor speaks of its “imposed” nature, symptom of,

the fame that Medellín obtained... people were thinking more about the prizes, winning international awards (*rather*) than really impacting, changing people’s lives...Social Urbanism got lost (respondent 12).

## 4. Lessons Learnt

The collated qualitative data broadly aligns with the direction of the new critical turn on SU; it is right to reign in its excesses. SU is no miracle, and we must guard ourselves against its intoxicating celebrity. Yet we must also withdraw from the precipice towards which the critical beckons us or we risk missing the lessons that SU *can* teach us as we connect space to peace. For critical analyses fail to advance beyond a claustrophobic,

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<sup>71</sup> i.e., a security by the gun, of surveillance, of military operations etc.

<sup>72</sup> Often predating the mayoral term of Gutiérrez, extending into Gaviria’s (2012-2015).

<sup>73</sup> Respondent 1



technologized optic of space, confined only to SU's quantitative "impact on the material conditions of life" (Brand, 2013:11). Space, however, is no "passive geographic or empty geometric milieu" (Lefebvre, 1996:262). If we focus just on these externalities, we lose how it is *internalised* and *lived*.

The qualitative findings of this paper majors on how SU invested "space (*with*) a different *meaning* and by that created a completely different reality" (respondent 30). Spaces which dignified, materialising a *right to the city* and promoting difference,

after passing 20 years having fear for ourselves and fear of each other... Now we can go and meet each other and forget about fear... we can trust each other again. And that's thanks to the public space (respondent 10).

Yet we can also learn by SU's failure, for it offers two powerful lessons to augment an *emplaced* urban peacebuilding. *First*, it must be attuned to how space is laced together and *networked*. The question is no longer only, can the subaltern speak and share in space? (Spviak, 1988), but rather: *can they move into it?* The *Ciclovía*<sup>74</sup> programme provides an all too brief window on what's possible when we democratise not just space but *mobility*. Indeed,

Ciclovía is exactly the same shitty street that you hate Mondays in the afternoon, with all the traffic jams, all the hate and pollution and then Sunday mornings it turns into magic... You see people from all different races, all different genders, from the north, south, kids, elders, black, white... you see all the diversity, and they live together happily, for at least Sunday mornings (respondent 30).

*Second*, the *scale* of intervention is also key. Rather than megaprojects unconnected to the local realities of communities, projects at *small-scale* guarantee strong participation. SU must therefore return to the people. For changes in space alone cannot secure peace in the city, "it would be utopic (literally: out of space) to think so" (Sanin, 2012:31). Rather, peace is contingent on the people *of* them. Place-based interventions to transform a city's socio-spatial reality must be undertaken *with* the people and *for* the people, if not, it's simply bricks and mortar.

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<sup>74</sup> A municipal open road policy for citizens to reclaim/pedestrianize every Sunday morning.

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## Appendix A: List of Respondents (by profile).

Respondent 1	Architect	17 June 2019
Respondent 2	NGO ACTOR	19 June 2019
Respondent 3	Academic	20 June 2019
Respondent 4	Architect	21 June 2019
Respondent 5	Social-cultural director ( <i>La Ladera</i> )	24 June 2019
Respondent 6	Digital Mediation ( <i>La Ladera</i> )	24 June 2019
Respondent 7	<i>La Ladera</i> Patron	24 June 2019
Respondent 8	<i>La Ladera</i> Patron	24 June 2019
Respondent 9	<i>La Ladera</i> Patron	24 June 2019
Respondent 10	<i>La Ladera</i> Patron	24 June 2019
Respondent 11	City Planner	25 June 2019
Respondent 12	Councillor	27 June 2019
Respondent 13	Museum Curator	2 July 2019
Respondent 14	Museum Director	2 July 2019
Respondent 15	Museum Liaisons	2 July 2019
Respondent 16	NGO Actor	3 July 2019
Respondent 17	Former Social Engagement Officer (EDU)	3 July 2019
Respondent 18	Academic	12 July 2019
Respondent 19	Former EPM	16 July 2019
Respondent 20	Former EPM	18 July 2019
Respondent 21	Inclusion Secretariat	22 July 2019
Respondent 22	Inclusion Secretariat	22 July 2019
Respondent 23	Inclusion Secretariat	22 July 2019
Respondent 24	Architect	25 July 2019
Respondent 25	ACI Employee	26 July 2019
Respondent 26	Architect	29 July 2019
Respondent 27	Architect	29 July 2019
Respondent 28	Mobility Secretariat	31 July 2019



Respondent 29	<i>Morvia Cultural Centre Patron</i>	2 August 2019
Respondent 30	Knowledge Systems/PR	6 August 2019
Respondent 31	INDER	8 August 2019

