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***Living through chronic violence
in Medellín, Colombia***

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Abstract

The nationalism turn provoked by the Enlightenment allowed the shift of the limitless authority of religious institutions to geographically defined space. During the construction of these *national imagined communities* (Anderson 1983), *alternative* forms of loyalties were also rising and posing a challenge to the future national institutions. In Colombia, since the beginning of the State-making process, several civilian wars limited the formation of a cohesive civil society that recognized itself under a common law; the centralized State failed in representing and solving many of the regional conflicts where often State itself was the main threat. In order to respond to many injustices peasants organized themselves in guerrilla movements and started moving offensives against those discussing their land rights. The elites, as consequences, to protect themselves financed self-defence groups that will later organize in the United Self-Defence of Colombia (AUC) also known as paramilitaries.

Alongside the escalation of violence in the countryside, similar dynamics were afflicting cities where local gangs controlled important portions of the urban territory. In Medellín the rising violence resized State sovereignty especially when the drug-cartel was created and the underworld had the total control of the city. State inefficiency in assuring livelihood to the lower classes, made the population vulnerable to the offers of the violence agencies that proving employment and building houses secured their presence, mostly in the peripheries; in some cases they even became new political referee. The contrast between these two worlds became visible in the urban structure, with criminal bands controlling the poor informal settlements in the mountains and the wealthier classes living in the planned centre, hardly protected by State forces. Many were the attempts to limit informality growth and criminality diffusion but the rising immigration in the city and people's faith in non-State groups, just led to the loss of trust in institutions.

In the 90s, the national political conflict and the local battles will meet when guerrilla groups and paramilitaries reach Medellín and establish their urban cells. In the fight against the communist threat, State forces had no choices that allying with non-State armed groups and during these military interventions, many were the civilian losing their lives. Since then, although the reduction of violence and the municipal attempts in recovering the lost civil society, the underworld is still having its influence in the city, negotiating its presence and activities with State forces to assure everyone existence. Years of urban wars, State abuses and generalized criminality have created a city where fear and seek for security spatialized in the different urban forms and particularly in the use people make of space itself. By mapping the different physical, social and political dynamics, this research tries to define the current *atmospheres* of Medellín, using Sloterdijk *Sphereology* for the interpretation of the *city-foams*.

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Introduction

The nationalism turn provoked by the Enlightenment allowed the shift of the limitless authority of religious institutions to geographically defined space. War making led to the creation of the current national States unifying citizens under what Anderson (1983) calls *national imagined communities* even though *alternative* forms of loyalties also developed during the 19th century and since then pose a challenge to longstanding institutions of sovereignty (Davis 2009). In an increasing urbanized planet, cities became the privileged locations of these *shared sovereignty*, where turf dynamics are more fluid and armed forces enter in conflict when their authority is discussed (Armao 2013). This unstoppable proliferation of disputed spaces and no one lands influenced the seek for security in the urban structure, from the construction of defensive architectures to the tactical use of spaces during battles. Understanding urban conflict and its violent manifestations become a complex exercise in a country like Colombia and in the city of Medellín, especially when investigating on the historical causes of the phenomena itself. Some authors even attribute the origin of violence to the Spanish conquistadores, declaring that the violent turn of the nation was somehow written in history. Because of the nature of this research exercise, the historical analysis limits in understanding Medellín *chronic* violence in the meanings space has collected, which of course reflect political and social issues of a larger story.

The evolution of the Colombian conflict finds its roots in the consequences of a national history of injustices and exclusions (Jaramillo 2011). Since the construction of the State in the middle of the 19th century, different political crisis and civil revolts generated countrywide wars. When order was re-established and few political parties governing, some classes and ideologies lacked of political representation, especially in those territories where the national hegemony entered in conflict with the legitimate land of rural and indigenous communities. Unconsciously or without their will, people found themselves within the borders of an unknown country that took control of their property and started exploiting its resources. At this point, different guerrilla groups rose around the 60s, such as FARC, that made land rights the cornerstone of their battles. Their propaganda soon found consent countrywide. With the leftist threats in the regions, self-defence groups, later known as paramilitaries, became the immediate solution landowners and politicians adopted to protect themselves and their belonging. The fight among State, guerrilla and paramilitaries laid the foundation for a history of conflicts and the further migration from the countryside that strongly affected the urban development of the major Colombian cities, including Medellín.

The urban history of the Antioquian capital is strongly affected by its regional morphology. Medellín takes place in the valley of Aburrá, within the South American Andes mountain range and started its growth in the valley-bottom. Decades before regional violence explosion and mass migration, the city already experience an important development because of strong industrialization and modernization. Rapidly this prosperity led to the physical saturation of the valley, limiting the further expansion of the settlement. Those migrating from the countryside, if initially were able to occupy the urban voids at the centre, later established in the mountains where the informal city was already rising due to unemployment. By law and for political will, informal settlements were not recognized nor admitted and many eviction attempts diffused among the slum dwellers the shared idea of an unjust and tyrant

State. Who was coming from the countryside was not protected in its original community (where, in some cases, State itself denied land ownership), obliged to leave because of the national conflict (where still State was involved and, eventually, fighting the supported group), excluded from the opportunities of the city because of his socio-economic conditions and criminalized when, in order to survive, sought refuge in the urban outskirts. The evolution of an alternative economy, seen as illegal and illicit, became the only livelihood source and that slowly permitted the proliferation of criminal groups filling those governance voids left by the State.

Among all the non-State armed groups, gangs are key elements in Medellín as members are deeply radicalized in their belonging community and actually born as forms of social aggregation (Malguizo & Cronshaw, 2001). When thinking about gangs, they are usually read with a negative connotation or linked to terrorism even though we need to remember they supplied basic services, such as food or energy, that State was not providing. Sometimes they even rescued communities from eviction. With another reading, gangs become in fact the results of a socio-economic exclusion: in poor environments with high unemployment, the industry of violence assures livelihood. In other neighbourhoods such services were offered by guerrilla members that entered the city once understood the accumulation of resources and people. Building houses and providing employment became the tool to secure people's trust and this occupation became also important for groups' logistics. For example, FARC occupied the Comuna 13 in Medellín that was close to the highway connecting the city with the Urabà, an important region for coca plantations. All these marginal neighbourhoods, already geographically and socially isolated, became real political islands in Medellín and State was not able to enter those territories; still today some no-go areas exist. Apart from the contrasts with the State, groups were also fighting each other when their legacy spaces were discussed by crossing the *fronteras invisibles*, the political borders between the different laws.

From the 80s, the city has experienced higher cycles of violence that reached their pick in 1991, the year Medellín became famous as the most dangerous city in the world. Alongside the fall of the cartel and the entry of political groups in the local belligerent dynamics, both civil society and public administration started promoting initiatives and projects to create alternatives to the overall violent atmosphere ruling in the city. The Urbanismo Social of Sergio Fajardo, mayor of the city from 2004 to 2007, is known as the highlight of this change, when many urban interventions created new synergies between State and marginalized inhabitants trying to solve both the issues of violence and poverty. In 20 years, Medellín became the most innovative city of Latin America and consolidate the *Medellín method* to tackle similar structural problems in other South American cities.

Starting from the historical analysis of the Colombian conflict and by using Sloterdijk foam theory as interpretative model of the urban atmospheres, the research will investigate on the spatial dynamics related to violence going on in Medellín. In particular, this exercise wants to answer the following questions:

- How did chronic violence evolved in Colombia and what are the spatial consequence in Medellín?
- How can urban atmospheres be described in violent context?
- What are the results in tackling violence through space modification in uses and forms?
- Which are the contribution of planning in these contexts?

Once introduced the concept of chronic violence, the first chapter will try to define its framework through the reading of the Colombian political history, the identification of non-State armed groups and the analysis of violence in Medellín. A reflection will be open on the relationship between informality and siege dynamics.

Chapter two reconstructs the physical growth of the city taking into consideration the powers driving its development. This step is important to discuss the current physical and social conditions and the overall citizen's experience of the city in terms of security and perception of danger.

Understood the construction of the urban environments, the third chapter describes the urban *atmospheres* of ten neighbourhoods considering the influence of non-State armed groups and their relationship with formal control. In a second moment the spatial conditions and uses that facilitate groups in controlling their territories will be analysed.

Chapter four investigates the resilience practices to violence of the urban foams, taking into account a double point of view: informal civil society and public administrations. The creation of bounds between the two represented the success of the Urbanismo Social whose method and spatial consequences will be reported.

The conclusions reflect upon the power of planning and physical intervention in building new spatial narrations but also question its tools for generating undesired violent turns.

Research Methodology

The development of this research has seen two distinct phases in its realization: the initial bibliographical work and the on-site stay which helped to concretely and visibly realize the intensity of the selected topic. Because of the multidisciplinary nature of the research, the material consulted included texts from history, political studies, sociology, psychology and geography discussing themes such as urban security, non-State armed actors, spatial sovereignty, chronic violence and, most important, the political history of Colombia. An overseas bibliography was clearly preferred, privileging researchers and authors with Colombian roots or, at least, deeply immersed in the context. The stay in the city facilitated this operation.

When in Medellín, July 2019, the time spent visiting the different urban environments was an eye-opening experience. Not visiting would have probably carried out a totally de-personalized and de-contextualized work. In the first month I was incredibly lucky to be surrounded by different figures such as sociologists, political scientists, activist, and NGOs workers which introduced me in the cultural scenario of Medellín. Those moments were all occasions to make interviews or to mingle with locals having relaxed chats about key neighbourhoods or about the city in general. Interviews were not-structures and total freedom was given to the interviewees; in some occasions I decided not to reveal my research purposes but I introduced myself as a simple tourist volunteering in Medellín. When people were telling me something related to violence while talking, I tried to divert the conversation on those topics by asking more information and justifying my interest with simple curiosity: *"these things do not happen where I am from"*. I decided to use this approach, especially in informal areas, as I assumed that making direct questions would have compromise the veracity of the information collected but especially to preserve others and myself safety: in these environments you never know

who might be around you listening. Other times, in safe environments, I could explain what I was doing and which ones were my specific interests. I noticed that even in closed rooms, people tended to lower down the voice when talking about the underworld.

Interviews are the fundamentals of this dissertation as through them it was possible to take real consciousness of the topic and better understand the spatial consequences of violence in the city. In the structure I was hosted, Fundación Casa Cultural La Chispa, many of the people working and gathering in the place were surprisingly informed and near to certain realities, and that facilitated the creation of a network of interviewers. Conversations were recorded by writing down the most relevant parts and reporting the general impressions on a personal logbook. The same method was used to keep track of the site visits.

In the following list, interviews are classified according to profession, age and gender.

Interview 1: University student, 27 years old (F)

Interview 2: Sociologist working at the University of Antioquia, 32 years old (M)

Interview 3: Inhabitant of barrio Santo Domingo, 34 years old (M)

Interview 4: Former inhabitant and current teacher of barrio Moravia, 33 years old (F)

Interview 5: Sociology student, 23 years old (F)

Interview 6: Employee working in the city centre, 32 years old (M)

Interview 7: Inhabitants and informal tour guide of Comuna 13, 50 years old (F)

Interview 8: Sociologist and artist, 34 years old (M)

Interview 9: Social worker at the Peace and Reconciliation Centre of El Triunfo, 36 years old (M)

Interview 10: Political scientist interested in territorial management, 28 years old (F)

Interview 11: Sociologist working for the Proyecto Colectivo Tejearaña (promoting land rights and community building), approx. 35 years old (F)

Interview 12: Music teacher currently working in Moravia, 31 years old (M)

Interview 13: Artistic director of Casa Kolacho, 21 years old (M)

Interview 14: Projects coordinator of Corporación Cultural Nuestra Gente, approx. 40 years old (F)

Apart from the interviews' methodology, other elements were important for approaching certain realities, especially the informal ones: roaming around might be dangerous sometimes, especially being a stranger to the eyes of the community. In some areas I had to pay special attention to protect myself and few times *authorized* people walked me around. For example, while visiting barrio Villatina a municipal worker showed me the situation in the neighbourhood but I was asked not to take pictures or speak too much because of my foreigner accent. A particular dressing code also was used when entering certain areas: sometimes it helped me not to stand out from the crowd, others I dressed as a typical tourist on purpose to be recognized as foreigner: this strategy unveiled successful results to

start a conversation. Despite the apparent dangers, those visits were important for the understanding of the spatial and social conditions of certain areas and each time a personal documentation through newspaper, bibliography and people's rumours anticipated the site-inspection.

Data and research complications

Mapping violence and crime in cities can rely on modern GIS technologies and the production of geo-localized archives became popular in the recent years for tracking and predicting crimes. The website of the Medellín municipality offers many thematic maps related but a selection had to be made because of the lack of specific information or the evident predictability of certain dynamics. For example for the vehicle thefts, motorbikes are mostly stolen in the mountainous areas while cars in central and wealthier areas: the economic status of the two environments and the accessibility conditions are clearly important variable justifying vehicular presence, quantity and related thefts in certain areas. Another discussible evidence is represented by the reported fights: they are evenly distributed in the whole city but there are no information concerning the actors involved nor the distinction between armed or not armed ones. The same lack of detailed information was found for the homicides, which are the most useful information to map conflict and violence dynamics. Fortunately, another database coming from the Sistema de información para la seguridad y la convivencia (Information system for security and coexistence) or SICS was found online and analysed with the help of ArcGis. The geo-localized homicides are reported from 2003 to 2017, but detailed information about deaths' responsible and/or victims provided just for the period 2009-2016. On average non-State armed groups are responsible for half of the homicides per year and, still on average, the 10% of the information have *"to be categorized"*. The detailed level of the archive allowed observing certain behaviours affiliated to violent actors, each time cross-checked with the help of other sources.

In researching evidences related to violence, a certain attention has to be paid on sources and information as their reliability can always be discussed, especially when official. Colombian government is sadly famous for its corruption and lack of transparency and, as confirmed by Davis (2012), data manipulation in certain context is common when institutions do not want to show weaknesses and failures of their system: everything always needs to appear under control. The tendency to hide certain matters is common when State itself is the first in using extreme violence but social and political consensus cannot be lost. It also happens that official announcement are used to show the fake success of certain policies or politicians even though media and people's evidence promptly discuss these propagandas. Media might be influenced by State corruption sometimes and, in some cases, even actors of the underworld could be responsible for diverting news. In order to tackle this issue, tendentially all the findings where each time triangulated between official sources, different newspapers, researches and, probably most reliable, people's rumours. Many of the locals with academic backgrounds suggested or agreed in the use of this methodology.

Concerning crime mapping and data completeness, other phenomena needs to be considered. One is the lack of people's reports to police and that happens mostly because of two reasons: the first is the generalized distrust toward police and public institutions as citizens know that in a corrupted system and with the underworld involved, no justice will be done. The second is the fear of violent consequences of non-State actors that prevents people to denounce facts or to seek for help in State

authorities. Another issue is the diffused phenomena of people and bodies' disappearance which clues are not reported in any database; specialized third-party agencies, also known as *oficios de la guerra* (war agencies) are taking care of the body vanishing, whose rests are sometimes found in Medellín river.

When interpreting data, especially cross-reading them through the years, the decrease of homicides does not mean disappearance of violent actors but actually increase of their political influence and social control. The *pax mafiosa* establishes periods of apparent absence of conflict among warring groups or between groups and public forces even though violence is easily set off. For example the undiscussed control of the Oficina de Envigado during the 2000 justifies the low rates of homicides despite the rooted presence of armed actors. Another consideration is actors' relocation: many of the interviewers suggested that while the intensity of violence in the Municipality of Medellín seems to be decreased, conflictive situations are currently going-on in the Municipalities of Bello and Envigado, respectively North and South of Medellín. Although the three municipalities are all parts of the Metropolitan city of Medellín, their institutional systems work disjointed and no relevant data was found to support this observation.

Reading Assumptions

In order to develop a research on chronic violence without cultural filters and preconceptions, different observations and personal reflections were necessary for such a challenging situation. First, being an Italian student in a Latin American context, it was clear that the understanding of some dynamics and issues needed more time to be processes as working in an environment responding to different cultural and social logics.

Even though the themes are somehow related to terrorism, Stephen Graham contributions, internationally recognized for his research on terrorism and planning, was initially consulted but later set aside. His work is mostly focused on the conflict between western world and extreme Islamism and so hardly suitable the Colombian context. Additionally, the vision of a war between State and terrorists is limiting and, in this case, even unfair when taking into account State slaughters and human rights violations still occurring today. When these acts are related to slum eviction or ethnic cleaning, some authors refer to this phenomenon as State terrorism. Re-thinking terrorism as a *modus operandi* and not as subjects, helps to have a neutral vision upon the actors of the Colombian violence, breaking down that barrier us and them that *"is only misleading ourselves, damaging both development co-operation and global security"* (Beall 2006). In any case references to terrorism are minimum and not relevant in the development of the research.

Other important concepts to clearly distinguish are the relationships between criminality and informality and between poverty and violence. For the first, the conditions that allowed informal construction and economy grow, are nothing but the results of a failed economic, social and political system to assure livelihood to everyone. The criminalization of this *class*, by using Davis words (2009), supports not only the State battle against illegality (in terms of housing piracy and irregular economy) but even civil society, in time, started labelling as criminals those settlers without even knowing which the real conditions were. For the same reasons the second correlation is not legitimate. Poverty is not directly linked to violence but the need for money makes people more vulnerable to accept the only

available positions the labour market offers, even if they are illicit.

A final clarification has to be done on the difference between conflict and violence. Conflict generates when two parts have different views or opinion regarding something: it can be a political indicator and does not imply violence. Violence is instead an event or an act that sees the use of force. It is the extreme way for conflict resolution.

Interpreting urban space as a foam

The run for safety and control has reshaped the physical environment and the city becomes an archipelago of political and social islands protecting themselves. It is interesting to see how the foam theory read these dynamics as an attempt from these worlds to preserve their *atmospheres* and how the built environment helps in doing so. The theory belongs to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, the author of the *Sphereology*, which rephrase the concept of society by placing spatiality at the top of the theoretical agenda. His philosophy is defined by Borch (2008) as an *“inventive attempt to rethink and re-conceptualize our being-together, its history and its spatial conditions”*.

For Sloterdijk, our understating and being part of the world has passed through three phases in human-being history. Initially the transcendental and spiritual Cosmos or God did not allow humans to understand and feel an *outside* of the world as they lived in the *“infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere”*. With Copernicus the outside is conquered and man is able to draw the boundaries of the globe, placing himself at the centre of the universe. In the contemporary epoch, we cannot be unified under one single institutionalized normative whole. Sloterdijk foam represents the latest episodes of the world interpretation by offering the idea of a formless world, were foams represent an irregular agglomeration of bubbles and globalization therefore equals to foaming (Ernste 2018).

Two basic assumptions are important to understand the theory: the first is the need to overpass the spiritual-material division as by our bodily being, *“we make sense of the world and we experience this*



Fig.1 Nakagin Capsule Tower (1972). The form of the building best represents the worlds of every single man structurally linked to its neighbouring cells. Architect: Kisho Kurokawa, Photographer: Noritaka Minami, Source: National Geographic

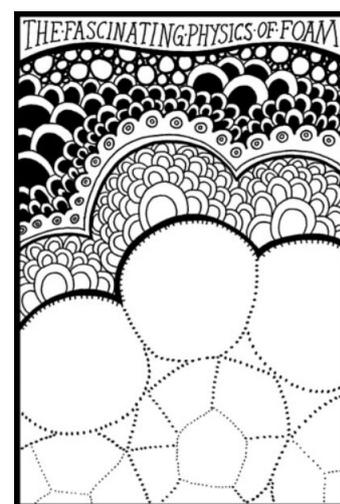


Fig.2 *Fascinating physics of foam*. Masonic Boom, graphic artist. Source: Pinterest.

sense in the form of a (spatial) ordering of experiences and meanings” (Ernste 2018). The second is placing the individual con-subjective embodiment at the centre of the phenomenology and not any longer the individual. Each bubble is an individual shape of a world we create through co-existence, where practices, shared norms and values help the sphere growing:

“whatever the degree of isolation established by respective individuals, they are always co-isolated islands that are momentarily, or chronically, connected to a network of adjacent islands constituting mid-sized or larger structures...we share at least one partition wall an adjacent world-cell.” (Sloterdijk)

Each sphere creates in fact its own reality but still is *“structurally coupled to its neighbouring cell”* (Borch 2008). In the physical world, single man apartment is what best represents the notion of bubble and, as bubbles share the same walls, they become the buildings that form cities (fig.1). Scaling up and down built elements represents then different *“socio-spatial crystal or rigid bodies of foams”* (Ionita 2013): when the physical assembly is elaborated, these foamspaces are communities, societies, nations.

Another key notion in the theory is the concept of *atmospheres*. As bubbles share a condition of co-fragility based on mutual influence, the protection of one bubble is closely related to the protection of others and consequently of the whole air. A welfare State aims to protect citizens from the effects of unemployment, illness, lack of education and that is possible air conditioning the entire system. In other occasions State has instead been responsible for *polluting* the atmosphere, in form of propaganda or with the use of violence against its population. In Medellín for example, on one side State authority was responsible for the positive growth of the city while on the other, slum eviction and the general excess of violence were causes of distrust in the State power. Sloterdijk refers to these events as *air-quakes*. When atmosphere are disintegrated, people no longer breathe the same air, leaving the individual without any value orientation and expose themselves to manipulation.

For the management and the governance of the atmospheres the philosopher offers the notions of *atmospheric ethics and politics*. Systems use immunization strategies based on a deepened, non-discursive vitalist impulse and ethical standards for the use of our common air condition must be formulated in order to preserve this we-immunity. If bubbles are the physical containers and the physical incubator of these atmospheres and they concretely shape in the urban world, how much does architecture and physical change contributes in atmosphere management? Can atmosphere be modified through design? To answer these questions, Borch recalls Newman’s *“Crime management through environmental design”*. Criminal behaviours threat the psyco-social immune system but through physical strategies and spatial design, the foamy systems can be preserved.

The reflection on the foam theory is actually the starting point of this work and applied on a neighbourhood scale. As middle-high class defend their atmospheres barricading themselves in urban islands in form of gated communities, illicit non-State armed actors defends informal settlements from the State for the preservation of their *world*. This reading key will be recalled many times during the research and, in the conclusions, the foam theory will discuss the findings of this work has developed.

Chapter 1 – Air quakes

Understanding Chronic Violence

When referring to violence, we need to read the phenomena with a social perspective. Although many sociologists and psychologists define it in different ways, violence is theorized as something *social* and built on a daily basis with the multiple exchange among human-beings (Espinosa, 2019). Violence is not a linear process of cause and effect but a self-reproducing, systemic phenomenon driven by the complex interaction between macro- and micro-level processes. According to Pearce (2007) violence becomes *chronic* when it falls in three dimensions including space, time and intensity: *“where rates of violent death are at least twice the average for high and low income countries respectively; where these levels are sustained for five years or more and where frequent acts of violence not necessarily resulting in death, are recorded across several socialization spaces, including the household, the neighbourhood, the school, inter community and the nation State public space.”* For Robert Muggah (2012) there are no ways to define or measured chronic violence, although the parameters should *“hinge on its direct and indirect characteristics, its intensity and duration, its spatial-socio characteristics, its intentionality and context.”*

Additional elements to understand chronic violence come from Adams (2012) that focused her research on the psychological effects on individuals. She finds the drivers in the growing extreme social inequality and disjunctive democratization, in the rise of organized crime and illicit trade and in the enduring legacies of armed conflict and historic State society tensions. For her it is essential to *“consider the processes operating at the individual, family and community levels, and how these macro- and micro-level processes interact with each other”*. People *“tend to trust others less and isolate themselves more, seeking safety behind walls, barriers, security gates and guards. As distrust grows, people look for protection in smaller, more reliable in-groups, such as churches and gangs, or through the intensification of ethnic or regional identities.”* Gated community and neighbourhood controlled by non-State armed actors are the tangible manifestation of these *in-groups* communities in Medellín and their self-isolation lead to the *social death* of the city itself.

An important point spontaneously came out from one of the interview (Interview 1) when discussing violence in Colombia:

“You can just accept that violence is a structural problem in the whole country and you get so soaked and inclined to the situation that you just passively accept it. That is the only way to keep living”. Also, *“people do not trust policemen as they know appropriate justice will not be made. That’s the reason why people do justice on their own as they can”*.

Extreme violence is in fact something normalized in such contexts and with the repetition of its occurrence it might even be culturally absorbed generally in the popular culture. Authors agree that *failed* States represent the typical scenarios for violence persistency as their authority is continuously discussed as much as its spatial control. In this situation citizens do not rely on State for basic security

and legal protection (States might prefer to prioritize the security of niches) and they consequentially respond by taking the matters into their own hands or allowing other actors to provide different forms of assistance. The provision of these services is not always asked nor the power illicit actors have is legitimate. Control can be achieved through violence itself and silence imposed from above, *“provoking tacit complicity between the silencers and the silenced”* (Adams 2012).

Before moving in the urban manifestation of chronic violence in Medellín, it is thus necessary to understand social, spatial and even political dynamics throughout the Colombian history. The next paragraphs will first show the *failed* construction of the Colombian State followed by a reflection on the armed actors that, still today, pose a challenge to State authority and sovereignty. All those informations will be contextualized in Medellín, where informal settlements lacking State interests and control allowed the proliferation of other forms of governance.

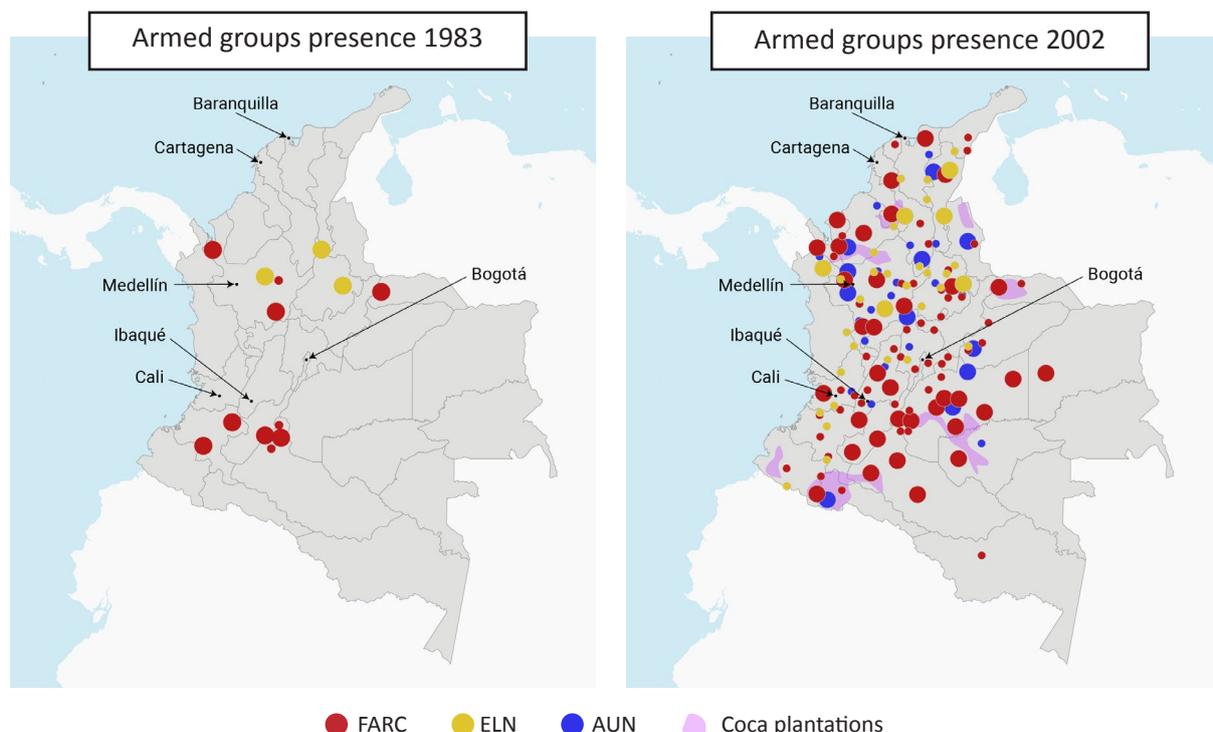
Colombia, a failed State making process

Starting from the Independence war from Spain, the Colombian history can be read as *“a constant succession of national civil wars and regional conflicts”* (Sanchez et al, 2002). After 1819, two political factions, Santanderistas, supporting Francisco de Paula Santander leader of the Colombian Independence, and Bolivaristas, supporters of Simon Bolivar *el Libertador*, had different ideas on the typology of national State to be formed. The firsts wanted a democratic and federal State with no religious dogmas being part of the political agenda; the others were oriented toward a centralized and conservative State. After years of contrasts, the political conflict exploded in the *“Guerra de los Supremos”*, a war that ended in 1842 with the creation of Conservatives and Liberals. The two parties ruled over the country creating the United States of Colombia first (1863) and the current Republic of Colombia three years later (1866). Tensions rose again by the end of the 19th century when the regional dissatisfaction against the centralized State exploded in the Thousand Day War (1899-1903), remembered as *“the most disastrous civil war in Colombia for human and economic costs”* (Sanchez et al, 2002). By that time peasants were armed and ready to fight among each other in the name of the political faction they were supporting (Interview 2). When order was re-established and Conservatives on power, a process of industrial growth and modernization was enabled, even though regional tensions were rising again. Land tenants were asking for better working conditions and reclaimed their food sovereignty challenged by the US exploitation, while native Indians were demanding the restitution of their communal land. With these agrarian movements collecting consents, regional inequalities increasing, a weak centralized State and the inherited tensions of years of political armed conflict, the bases for a new war were set. *La Violencia* began in 1948 and was fought for ten years among all the political parties countrywide. This period is a crucial moment in influencing the history of Colombia and Medellín because of two reasons: the first is the uncontrolled growth of the major cities due to the mass immigration from the countryside. The second is the formation of guerrilla groups and other non-State armed actors that will join the long-standing Colombian conflict still nowadays going on.

Since 1946, Conservatives began using State forces to repress Liberals supporters but the war declared just two years later with the assassination of the Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitàn (Turel 2013). Liberals' armed supporters started rebelling and fighting the government while Conservatives-supporting peasants were encouraged to occupy Liberals lands. In the meanwhile, the Communist party

also joined the conflict by promoting the self-defence of the population especially in the countryside. Violence rapidly escalated countrywide (Sanchez at all 2002). After years of war, the *Fuente Nacional* of 1957 re-established civilian rule for a while with Liberals and Conservatives alternating their power every four years. This agreement excluded the representation of other political parties and associated supporters and additionally, not policies were foreseen to tackle regional and agrarian conflicts. As response, the Independent Republic movement was formed against the “*elitist agreement that restricted democracy*” (Turel 2013) but immediately repressed by the national army in 1963. Not much later peasant resistance groups under the guidance of the Communist party, reorganized themselves in the *Revolutionary Army Force of Colombia* (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionaria de Colombia), better known as FARC, with the mission of fighting against the repression of the government and defending equal land ownership (1964). Other armed groups joined this political war, starting as regional cells but later expanding in the whole country. The *National Liberation Army of Colombia* (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) was born the same year as FARC; it was a Marxist ideology movement whose rebels were trained in Cuba. 1967 was the year of the *Popular Liberation Army* (Ejército Popular de Liberación, EPL), again supported by the Communist Party of Colombia and promoting the social revolution by establishing urban cells. Three years later, the second biggest guerrilla movement after FARC, the *Movement of the 19th April* or M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) was initiated by a group of students and soon engaged the attention of the lower-middle working classes, unrepresented by the traditional parties.

All of these groups were sustaining themselves mainly through illicit activities such as extortion, kidnapping and robberies that were smaller ways to finance war compared to narco-traffic. State absence in big areas of the country allowed non-State armed groups to begin the business opening initially cocaine-processing laboratories and later massive coca plantation. Inhabitants of these areas



Maps 1 & 2: Armed groups' presence in 1983 and 2000. Author's elaboration. Data Source: Sanchez at all 2002.

were usually forced to migrate elsewhere if not accepting non-State groups conditions and those who dare to rebel were killed. As counter-effect, big land owners, drug-lords and even some politicians had to protect themselves from guerrillas attacks and started financing self-defence armed groups that, after the national decree known as *Las Convivir* of 1994, will gather in the *United Self-Defence of Colombia* (AUC) also known as paramilitaries. By this time their strategy switched from being defensive to offensive and their actions even escape from the control of the national State. Reunited by an extreme right-wing ideology, paramilitaries attributed themselves public functions and started murdering autonomously the so called *friends of the guerrilla* (Sanchez et al 2002).

In the 80s, and especially in the 90s, Colombia saw a strong increase of violence, intensified by the radicalized drug cartels in the major cities and the linked international illegal market. Colombia became the most important cocaine exporter in the whole world and Medellín its main hub. The country's attention will be focused for years on the war on drug and just after the death of Escobar (1993), shifts on guerrilla movements with the support of the paramilitaries. Different peace processes were actually tempted since the 80s but just few of them were successful, such as the one with M-19. With ENL and FARC for example, the agreements never saw explicit commitments from all the parties, and conflict continued for many years. In 2003 an agreement with the AUC was reached under the government of President Uribe and their demobilization officialised in 2005. However, paramilitaries still exist today in different forms or with other names and often State politicians are accused to be connected with them. In 2016, after four years of negotiations, FARC signed a peace agreement and the movement institutionalized in a political party. On the 29th of August 2019, the group announced its return to the arms as they accused the national government not to respect the conditions of the shared pact.

Understanding Colombian non-state armed groups

So far we have seen that the “*rule of ruled and rulers*” (Davis 2009) was never fully established in the Colombian State making process as its violent and oppressive modus operandi created the spontaneous development of other political and social referee. Davis explains these organizations by using Anderson's concept of imagined communities and defines them as “*alternative imagined communities of loyalties*”, compared to national ones. These other forms of fidelity can provide different whether new forms of welfare and employment, create non-State sovereignty and assure their security by arming themselves or hiring armed actors to protect their activities and dominion. Guerrilla, paramilitaries, narco-traffickers, urban militias and urban gangs are all examples of these new communities but, when referring to non-State armed groups, even *formal* groups have to be taken into account. Citizens pay private agencies or hire personal guards for their safety and might even carry guns for self-protection. In extreme cases people protect themselves through communitarian vigilantism, adopting popular justice and legitimizing their *derecho a matar* (right to kill). In any case, when State channels are bypassed and people turn to non-State actors, it means State itself is not able to guarantee a public key function: security. This worldwide redistribution of coercive power means that not only States and cities have lost their monopoly in providing security, but they have even lost their sovereignty in terms of authority and power.

The nature of imagined communities is usually political or economic but they can eventually share their networks in order to operate across multiple scales simultaneously (Davis 2009). Colombian

groups have shown that those interests could switch in time or the line between the two might even blur. FARC for example was born following a political line but was also fighting for the hegemony over the cocaine business in the countryside with other organizations. Different was the evolution of the paramilitaries that started as a mercenary army and became later a radicalized right-wing autonomous group. Urban gangs differs from these supra-local organizations because of both their scale of action and purpose. Their control and military strategies are based on district-scale level and their micro-wars occurring in areas of few blocks. They are not interests in change or overturn the political system but just in preserving their economic and illicit business from State threats. In multiple scale processes, gangs represent the local traders of the international drug-business market. Higher organizations with international networks, such as the *Medellín cartel* once or the *Oficina de Envigado* today, provide army and goods to gangs that worry on covering and preserving the market in the area they control. They still preserve their identity and relationship with the community they are part of, but the influence of higher groups can sometimes affect their behaviour.

Alliances between armed actors do not exclude the State. A common goal could in fact near public and private forces as it happened in the 90s in Medellín with the Bloque Metro that saw national forces collaborating with paramilitaries. That was a clear example of a failed State engaging non-State units to conquer its (lost) control over the territory. In this conflict, it becomes hard for citizens to know who will protect them or who will use violence against them, especially when State is the first violating human rights and hides its crimes. Colombia is sadly famous for its strong armed repression along with its political corruption. Citizens in fact have little trust in State authorities and their credibility resize when pacts with non-State groups are made in front of everyone's eyes. Sometimes non-State armed groups pay policemen to turn a blind eye while other times are public forces paying gangs to maintain violence levels low in certain neighbourhoods.

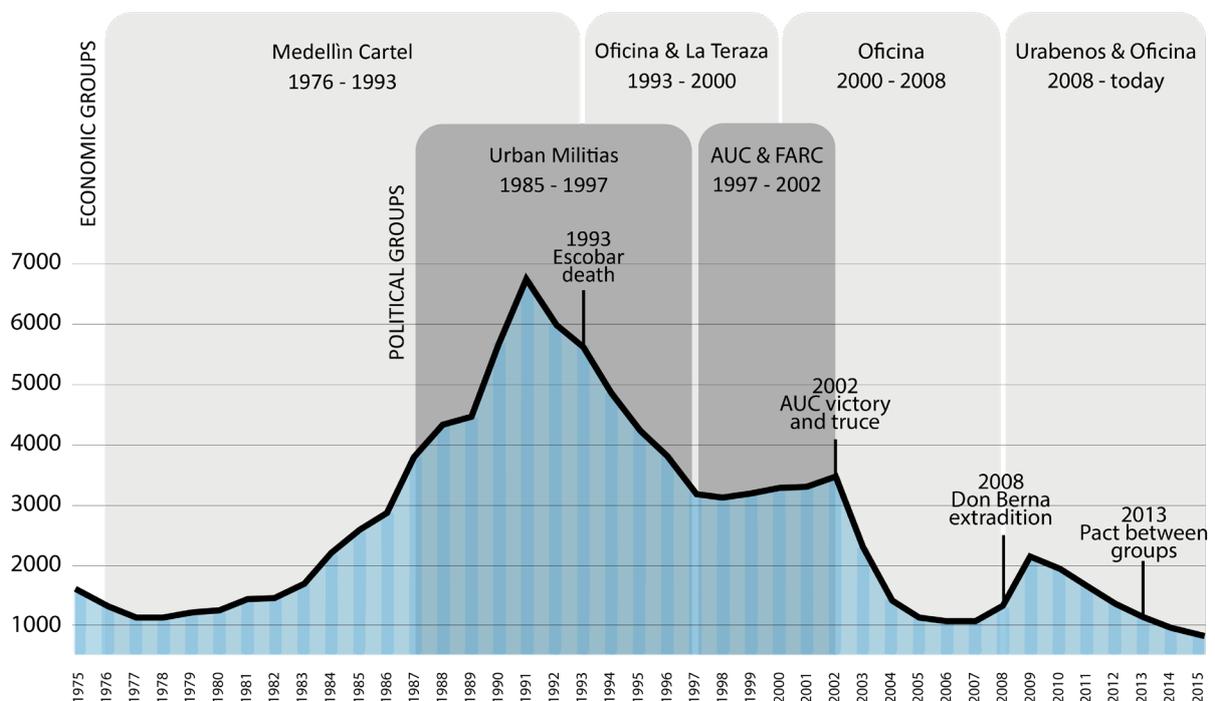
On a last note, it is important to underline that when one groups ceases to exist, for example when enters the peace process, part of their former members not always get out from the circle of violence. Paramilitaries demobilization and rehabilitation programmes for example began after the agreement of 2005 but part of them later reassembled in the *Urabeños*, the most powerful *banda criminales* (BACRIM) of the Colombian underworld, currently involved in illicit trafficking (drug, weapons), corruption and illegal mining (Bargent & Charle 2018). Other times reintegration processes encounters gaps from the civil society itself. Ex-members of gangs for example struggle to find employment: people know their past and are scared to work with former killers if not having legitimate resentments for what they did. They might end up falling again in their former illicit networks for livelihood, implying or not the use of violence.

Explaining violence in Medellín

The insight on the Colombian conflict and the differentiation of non-State armed groups is important to understand the development of violence in Medellín. When guerrillas and paramilitaries moved the national conflict in the city during the 90s, urban gangs were already posing a challenge to State institutions at the local scale. Violence in Medellín can be read in cycles according to the groups having major influence between the underworld and the visible control of the city. According to Malguizo & Cronshaw (2001), organized criminal activities in Medellín started in the '60s with a criminal

consortium called *bandas de la pesada* (gangs of heavies). This network included businessmen, smugglers and different authorities but was commissioning lonely bandits for their operations in order to secure a low profile. The *malevos* (bad guys) were not seen as meaningful problems to public order as the repercussion of their activities did not represent a strong social or political threat. From the 70s, the critical economic situation and the spreading of informality, led to the formation of youthful street aggregations called *galladas*. They did not start as criminal bands but as forms of socialization responding to unemployment, housing, social exclusion etc. Their business was mostly linked with black market goods, such as cigarettes, whose networks increased with the stagnation of the city's economy and the lack of employment of those years. Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel represented the turning point for the exploitation of the city's underworld. Arms and money were provided to gangs whose markets were soon replaced by cocaine once shown the economic possibilities of the new product. With drug-trafficking, the escalation of violence and the homicides critically increased in the 80s (Graph 1) and facing the cartel became the first priority of Medellín, a city that was no longer able to guarantee security within its perimeters. With the help of the United States, the *War on Drugs* and the hunt to Pablo Escobar started, also supported by Los Pepes (Persecuted by Pablo Escobar), a group of criminals enemies to the cartel. The intensity of these years allowed the formation of a real sub-culture of criminality and violence that even mixed with the *paisa* culture (inhabitants of the Antioquian district).

In the same decade, another typology of local armed group formed. In 1984, President Betancur's peace initiatives directed toward ELN, EPL and M-19, led to an internal crisis within the guerrillas



Graph 1. Homicides number in Medellín per year with main events & key actors reported. Data source: Colombia Reports: "Medellin crime and violence. Fact sheet", October 20, 2016. Medical Examiner's Office.

movement and some members moved in cities. Here, the strong presence of gangs, mini-wars inside neighbourhoods and the leftists' ideology diffused in the marginal barrios, facilitated their reallocation. They integrated mostly by providing security services in form of vigilantes or night patrol, protecting communities from gangs or police offensives and making social cleansing operations (drug-addicted and robbers). The so called *milicias urbanas* easily acquired community consent for their defensive nature and became the political leaders of the abandoned population. Although the Media Luna Peace Agreement of 1984 promoted by Gaviria's government, the organization was not dismantled completely and its rise was facilitated with the death of Escobar and the official fall of Medellín cartel (1993). After these two events, a war inside the underworld started for the control on the drug-business network.

From 1995, the war in Medellín changed its nature from economic to political. Combatants from FARC and AUC reached the city, turning the national countrywide conflict in an urban war (Blair, Hernandez & Guzman 2008). Local police and national army, allied with the paramilitaries, started their military strategy in 1997 with the Bloque Metro that, after minor initial results, reached its success when Diego Fernando Murilio alias *Don Berna* was in charge of the whole operation. Don Berna was a former member of the Medellín cartel but later rebelled to Escobar with Los Pepes. After 1993, he joined the major narco-traffic bands in the city, *La Teraza* first and the *Oficina de Envigado* from 2002. With this new commander expert of the Medellín underworld dynamics and tactics, the victory over guerrillas was achieved in just one year and paramilitaries later announce truce entering the peace process (Rozema 2007). Since the victory over the guerrillas in the city, homicides rate dropped dramatically also because of the Oficina's control on more than 120 gangs (Den Held & Robbins, 2019). A new wave of violent activity started again in 2008, the same year Don Berna was extradited to the United States and the various drug lords were fighting to inherit the Oficina's network. After years of conflicts and with the entry of the *Urabeños* in the drug market, a "*criminal commission*" decided violence had to stop and a pact was made in 2013 between the Oficina de Envigado and the paramilitary group (McDermott 2013).

Violence implications on a local scale

The division in cycles helps to understand whose groups and which laws were ruling over the city and had the major influence in Medellín criminal scene. However, finding a common narration for the entire city is difficult as each neighbourhood experienced its own history in the proliferation and alternation of armed actors. Surely, urban gangs represents a constant in the whole narration of violence as their presence within the communities was actually the tool that allowed higher organizations to enter and later control bigger urban districts. None of the armed actors in fact, including State, ever had the control of the whole city and its physical presence (Samper 2018). Violence and actors usually increase their dominion in limited areas following three dynamics: relocation, when groups move from one neighbourhood to another because of law enforcement or when profits are exhausted, diffusion, when criminal activities spread out from one spatial unit to the surrounding ones, and hierarchic diffusion when crime expands by means of imitation or innovation and does not require spatial contact (Sanchez et al, 2002).

In their dominion, each non-State armed group imposes its own rules during its dominion. For example, as Rozema (2008) reports, FARC did not allow people's informal gatherings nor were outside visitors.

In schools they imposed the study of Lenin and Che Guevara and young men were forced to military training in the night. Death penalty for each crime was assuring justice, eliminating dissidents and enemies with public executions. Paramilitaries had a different approach, using the *law of silence* for their activities: everything was happening in secret and uncomfortable people simply disappeared. Regardless of the authority governing, every service and shop was taxed and for some periods public transport and taxis were not even covering routes in popular neighbourhoods. Among all, the most vulnerable were young men as they could represent either a resource or a threat. The degree of welfare and identity these groups offer are appealing to unemployed people, especially if young. In her study based on Medellín, Caroline Doyle (2004) found that the weekly salary for a gang member is above 300 US dollars while a minimum paid labour job is 175 US dollars a month.

In these isolated and marginalized communities, people was not able to make long-term plans as they found themselves in real battlegrounds. Displacement was the only alternative to avoid death and Medellín reached the 20,1% of inter-urban displaced people in 2010 (Source: Unidad de análisis y evaluación de política públicas, Alcaldía de Medellín), the highest in the whole country. A municipal employer specialized in conflict resolution I interviewed worked with families which were displaced seven times. In general this situation did and still today does not permit people to escape from the circle of socio-economic exclusion, especially when State itself evicts population without solid plans or alternative housing solution.

Informality and violence

As mentioned mass immigration to cities started in the 60s due to the escalation of regional violence and, within this shrinking process, even conflict moved in the city, in particular when non-State armed actors realized population and goods accumulation in urban environment meant strategic locations for their illicit-trade logistics or new opportunities for their political propaganda. Rodgers (2009) reads this process as transition from *peasant to urban wars*. New geographies of power were in fact re-established in Medellín, when informal peripheries replaced those State voids once left in the countryside. State *war on slums* through violent eviction, soon turned to a *slum war*, when those environments controlled by armed groups became impenetrable sites and real battlegrounds among armed actors.

Militaristic disciplines defines this typology of conflicts as *fourth generation wars* when the fight involves State and non-State armed groups and the “*core lies in the universal crisis of legitimacy of the State*” (Lind 2004). *Low-intensity war* or *asymmetrical conflict* are other interesting ways to describe these war dynamics. The first refers to the variety of non-conventional attacks which are commonly conducted in small groups or targeting specific locations or victims. The second is used when in a conflict the weaker combatant, in terms of belligerent resources, looks for strategies which can compensate its qualitative or quantitative lack. Slum environments and their physical structure become a great resource for non-State armed groups as their intricate pattern are unknown by the enemy and narrow streets limit his visibility. Moreover, State was never able to enter and map those environments and so its limited territorial knowledge again works in favour of non-State groups.

An important interpretation of slums comes from Mike Davis in its *Planet of Slums* (2002), that uses the strong image of informal settlement as “*human dumping grounds*” or “*solution to the problem of warehousing the twenty-first century’s surplus humanity*”. With a broader vision, slums can otherwise

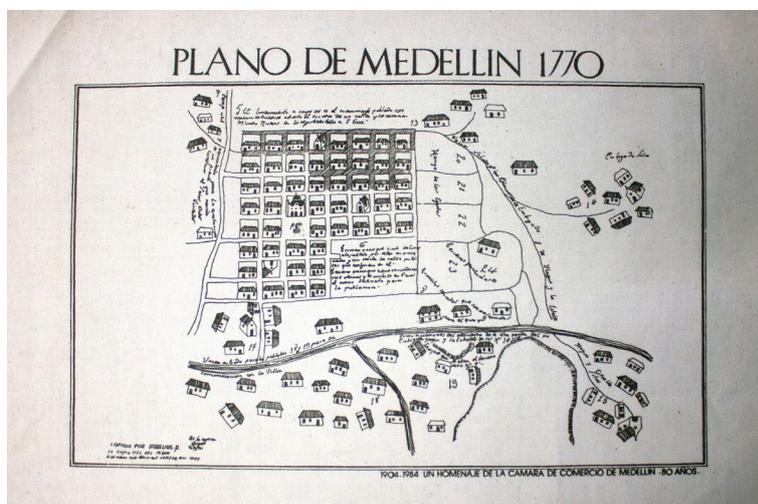
be defined as the *“by-product of a capitalist society”* (Samper 2015), becoming the failing result of an economic and political system to provide quality of life to all world citizens. This *social class* in Marxist terms would mobilize not against exploitation but toward exclusion, and Rodgers (2009) considers gangs as *“a potential vanguard form of social mobilization of the new informal proletariat”*. In some moments, gangs were in fact those assuring security to inhabitants, especially when State was threatening slums dwellers’ survival. These groups in fact can provide other services apart from employment and social status. For example Pablo Escobar built houses for the poor, developing his political consensus and achieving loyalty from the poor. Something similar happened in the barrio *La Libertad*, where the guerrilla group M-19 helped locals to build their houses, legitimizing their presence in the territory. In other cases turf control was violently taken; if population did not surrender or adapt, they were expelled or killed. Basically it was impossible choosing to be neutral. Non-state armed groups could then secure community cohesion or led to the fragmentation of the social tissue.

Chapter 2 - City foams

In the first Chapter we have seen how the political history of Colombia had its consequences on Medellín for both the growth of its population and for the continuum of the national conflict. The historical narration yet has focused onto the identification of the violent actors alternating their dominion in the city but no attention was paid to its physical growth. The second chapter will focus on this aspect, retracing the history of the city by analysing its spatial development in relationship to social and political dynamics.

Medellín physical growth

The first trace of Medellín dates to 1616 when the Conquistadores entered the Aburrá valley and founded the village of *San Lorenzo de Aburrá* on the Eastern part of the river. The settlement moved where the centre is today just in 1675 and recognized as Medellín in 1823. Agriculture and mining were the main economic activities and the richness of the valley attracted different Europeans from England, France and Sweden that moved in Colombia to discover the business possibilities of the territory. An immediate consequence of this migration was the restyling and the *modernization* of the city. In fact, the wealthy elite wanted the European taste to be reflected in the spaces of the city and different infrastructures such as parks, churches and schools were built. The most famous of this period and still standing are the Metropolitan Church (fig. 1) and Bolivar Park, inaugurated in 1875 and today icons of Medellín.



Map 1. Plan of Medellín 1770. Source: Biblioteca Pública Piloto Medellín



Figure 1. Basilica Metropolitana 1981. Author: Carvajal Pérez. Source: Archivo Digital Biblioteca Pública Piloto Medellín

The city expanded according to the original colonial matrix and by the beginning of the 20th century, other cores were raising (chronological development map 1908) due to the growth of textile and processing factories. Their large-scale production required unavailable spaces in the centre and new settlements, that later will become municipalities (such as Bello and Envigado), were created in order to host factory plants and housing for workers. The building of sewer systems, aqueducts and electric trams in advance with respect to the national growth, made Medellín the *utopia of progress*,

although the city recognized the lack of aesthetic quality and proper urban management. Again the elite took care of the issue by founding in 1899 the *Sociedad de Mejoras Publicas* (Society for Public Improvements) whose purpose was “*looking after the ornamentation and embellishment of the city*” (Vasquez 1998). The establishment of this society was tactical: by providing lightning, public spaces and urban furniture, the elite secure its role in the planning decisions of the city, driving its development according to its interests.

Medellín became officially the industrial capital of Colombia in 1919 when connected to the national railway system, a situation that “*demanded the recruitment of workers creating a new urban social class with its own collective organization and producing a series of demands to be looked after*” (Vasquez 1998). In fact no real urban drawing was ever done for the city that spontaneously grew collecting together population of the same socio-economic class or with the same interests. As Vasquez comments, “*each sector of the population isolated itself and marginalized from the other part of the city did not compete with, because it had no relationship nor any form of communication*”. By this time even the elites earlier living in Santa Elena, a town on the East of Medellín, moved in the city as the centre became the place for business. For them a brand-new neighbourhood of aesthetic and unique villas was built, known as Prado, today recognized as historical heritage.

The economy of the city kept growing during the 30s and the 40s and so did the population. As Table 1 shows, numbers doubled in twenty years from 1918 to 1938. In terms of urban space and quality of life this growth was not positive as no plans were addressing the physical expansion. Land prices increased as no buildable space was available. Housing districts became dormitory suburbs while the centre was congested during the day and dangerous during the night. The first *Reglamentacion de edificaciones* of 1935 did not solve the situation. Buildings were now allowed to increase their heights and, as consequence, the density of activities and vehicles in the centre grew. Public space was not existing any longer. In this collapsing situation, the elites were again looking for exclusive spaces and the land of the West became desirable. This side of the river had always been occupied mostly by farms and factories as the swampy lands and the amount of vegetation limited construction. From the beginning of the 30s, the *Cooperativa de Empleados* (a labour union) started providing social housing for workers commuting on that side, opening also new possibilities for the city expansion (chronological development maps 1932). When the planning committee approved the construction of the Stadium and the *Finca La Palestina* (the future Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana) to be built on the West of the valley, the elite also secured their spot here as new buildable lots were created. The increasing prices of land forced low-income population (mostly farmers) to leave their belonging and re-organized their communities in the North-East of the city, placing the bases for the growth of the informal settlements of the following decade.

In 1949 the first urban plan for the *city of the future* was made (map 2). The metropolitan scale of the project was the big innovative element architects Paul L. Wiener and Jose L. Sert introduced, overcoming the rigid post-colonial imprint and aiming to open new possibilities for the city/countryside relationship. Alternative and wider axis of expansion were traced and zoning suggested as the key strategy to re-organize the whole city. According to the plan, the centre was expected to be the commercial and financial core, with no housing provided. Although the important amount of positive changes the plan was expected to bring and the total support of the elite, the Plan Piloto became

effective just in 1959 when the migration flux was too intense and the urban environment altered too much for the adequate application of the project (Jaramillo 2005).

Medellin population by year	
1905	59.815
1912	70.547
1918	79.146
1928	120.044
1938	168.266
1951	358.189
1964	772.887
1973	1.077.252
1985	1.468.089
1993	1.630.009
2005	2.216.830
2011	2.706.087
2017	2.840.644

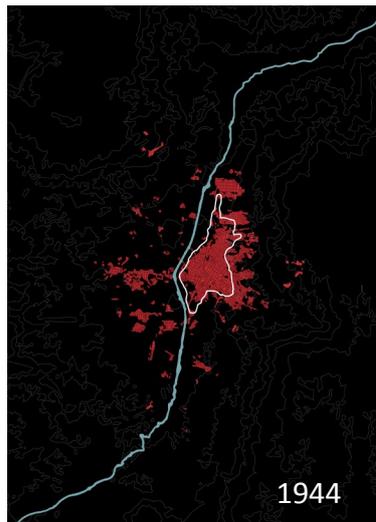
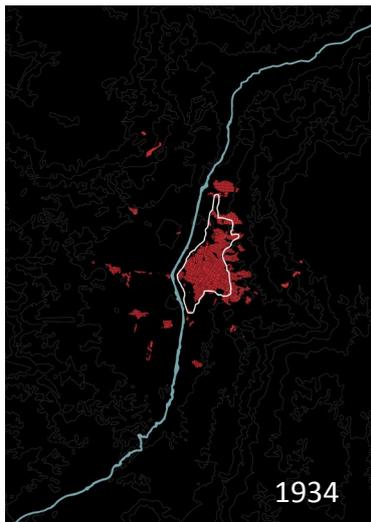
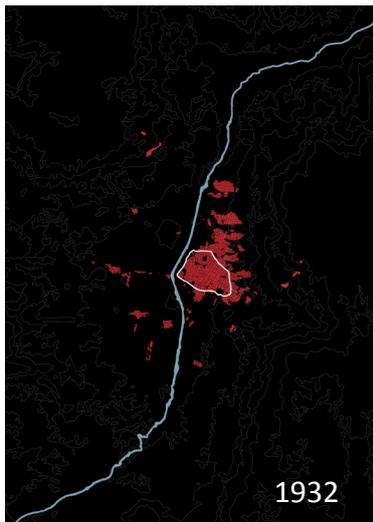
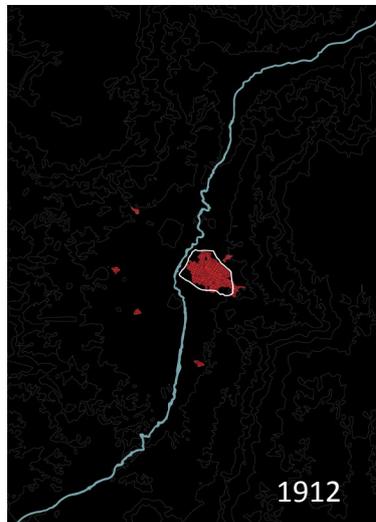
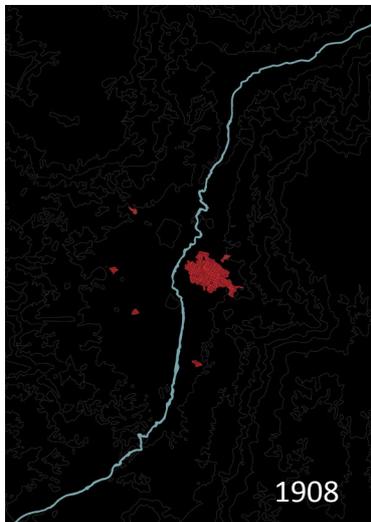
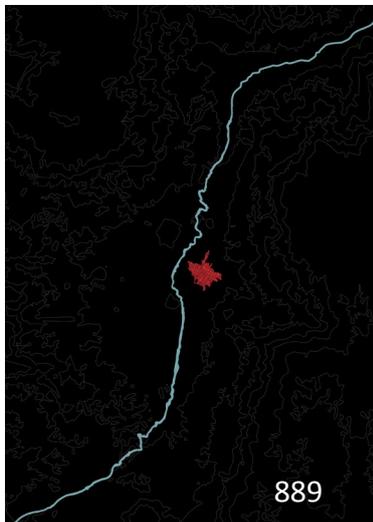
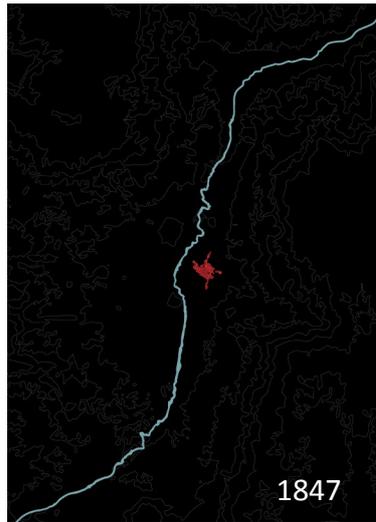
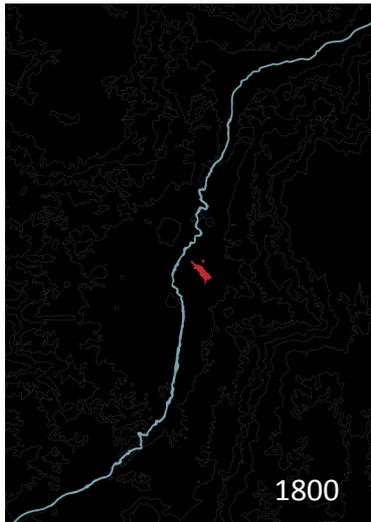
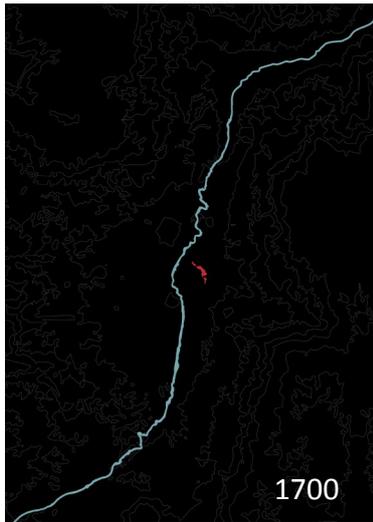


Table 1. Medellín Population by year. Source: Census by DANE

Map 2. Plan Piloto 1949. Source: Biblioteca Pública Piloto Medellín

With the beginning of La Violencia in 1949, the huge migration due to conflict drove population to move in cities looking for safety and new opportunities but no infrastructures nor job offers were ready to host these important numbers of people. The manufacture industry in Medellín reached its stagnation in the 50s and so did its general economic growth. For the newcomers, informality became thus the only livelihood option. Migrants initially joined the precarious settlements in the North-West but later spread in the whole valley, mostly on the precarious and dangerous sloped hills (chronological development map 1950), hardly reachable from State control. Their source of income was represented by the commerce of contraband and highly taxed prohibited goods, such as cigarettes, placing the bases for informal international trade networks.

This situation of mass immigration, informal construction and economy continues will go through the 60s with the consolidation of the illicit goods market and the first criminal bands appearing. From 1951 to 1964 the population doubled again (tab. 1). Slum eviction operations, already started in the previous years, found at this point the strong resistance of the settlers that forced the municipality to stop forced expulsions and to assure land tenure to communities. The easiest strategy for the municipality was extending the urban perimeter, a fast solution that will be used other times with the increase of the informal city (chronological development map 1963). Inhabitants in this way could formally be recognized as citizens of Medellín and allowed to access funds and policies for social housing. In fact the mass migration was affecting the whole country and the national government of Colombia created in 1963 the *Istituto de Credito Territorial* (Territorial Credit Institute) with the purpose of providing low-cost housing to vulnerable population. Unfortunately the number of rural immigrants was too high and the governmental efforts not enough to cover the whole informal population. A different solution was promoted by the *Empresas Publicas de Medellin* (Agency for Public Works) to improve urban habitat conditions. The agency created a division called *Habitation de viviendas* (Housing Improvement), later institutionalized as *Politica de Mejoramiento de las viviendas marginales* (Policy for the Improvement of marginalized housing), whose aim was providing clean water, sewer infrastructure and energy even before land tenure was achieved. For the EPM that actually represented an economic gain as the repairing costs to the damages caused by pirate connections were higher than building a new network



● Formal settlements

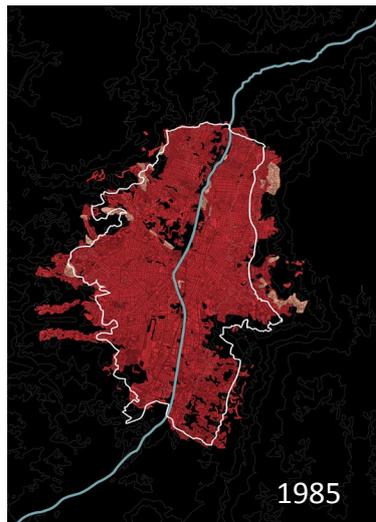
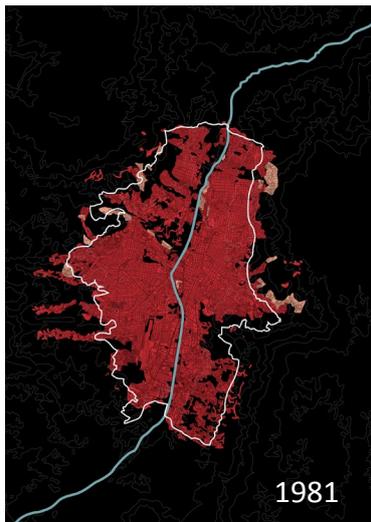
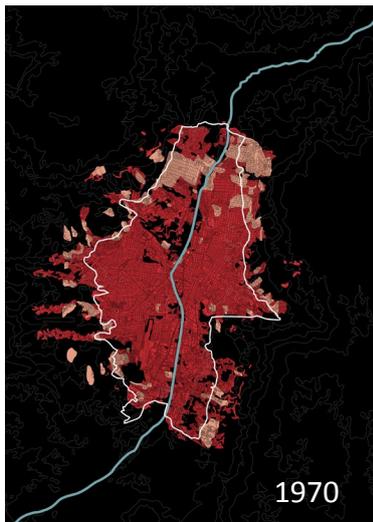
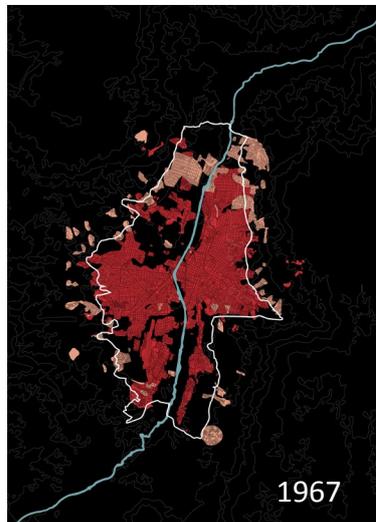
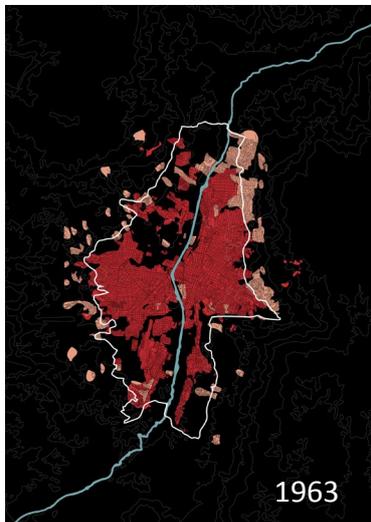
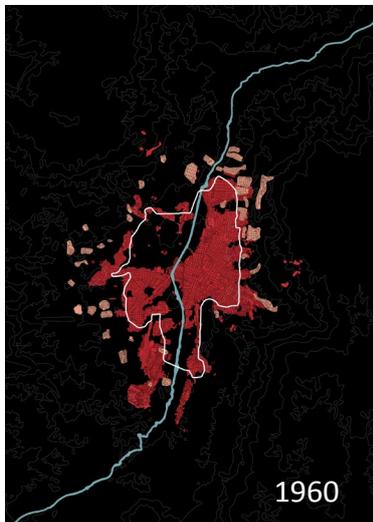
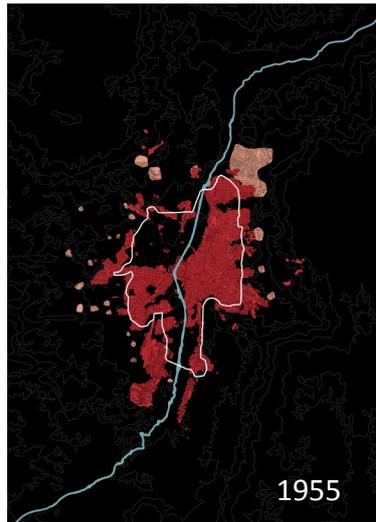
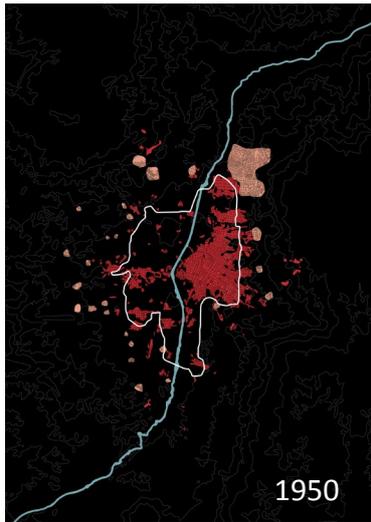
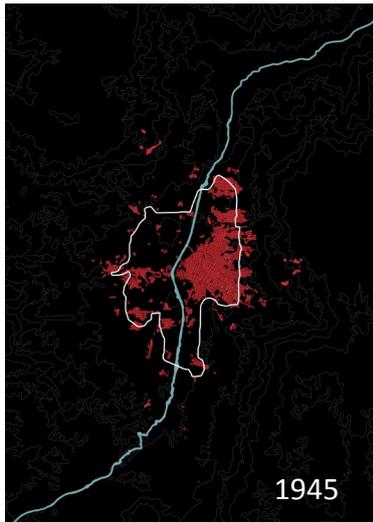
● Informal settlements

▭ Urban perimeters

0 10 km



Chronological Development Plans 1700 - 2014. Author's elaboration.
Sources: various historical maps and Samper 2015.



● Formal settlements

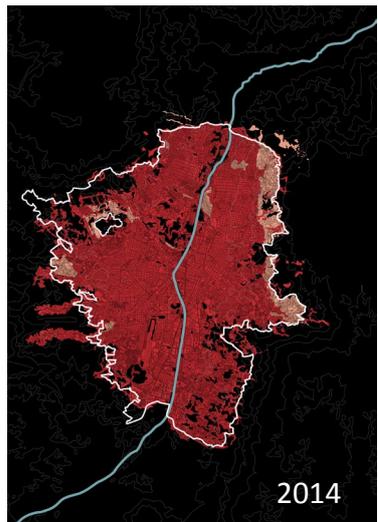
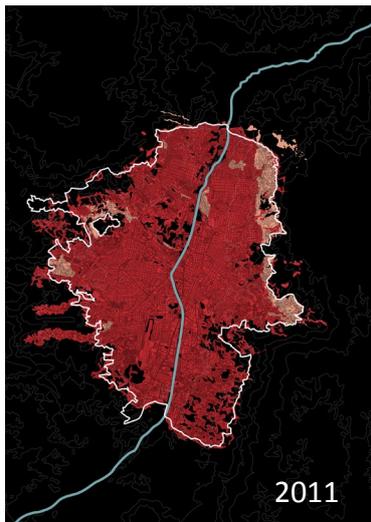
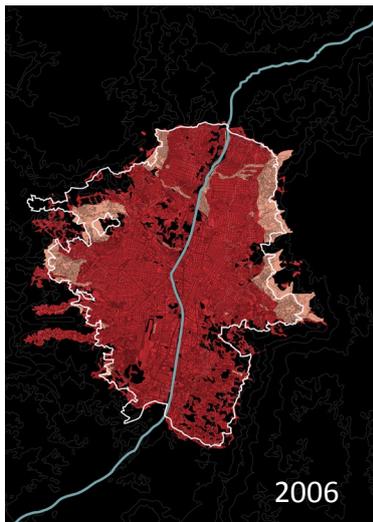
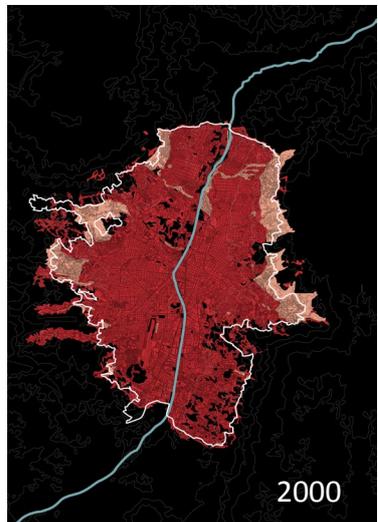
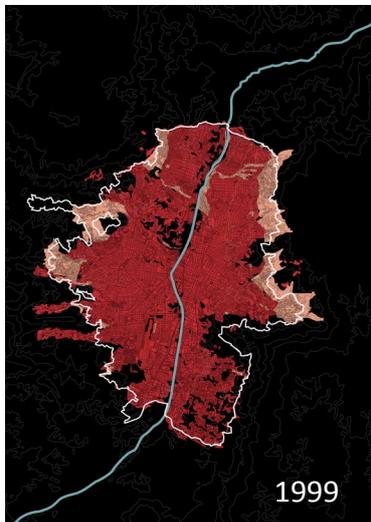
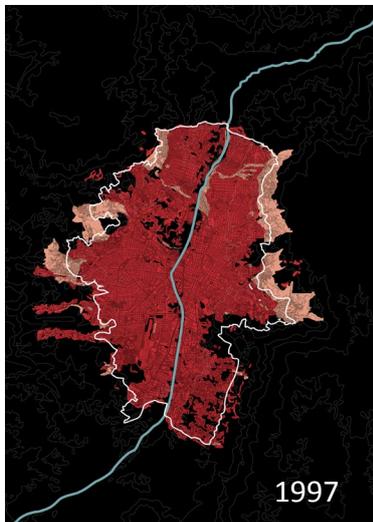
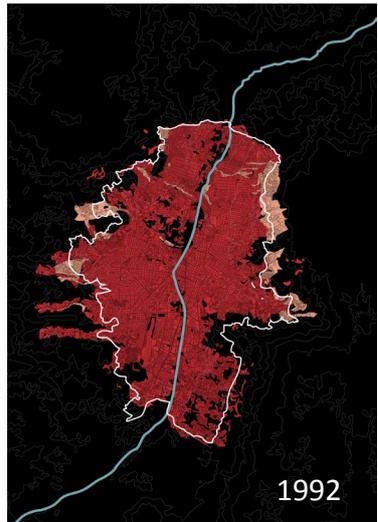
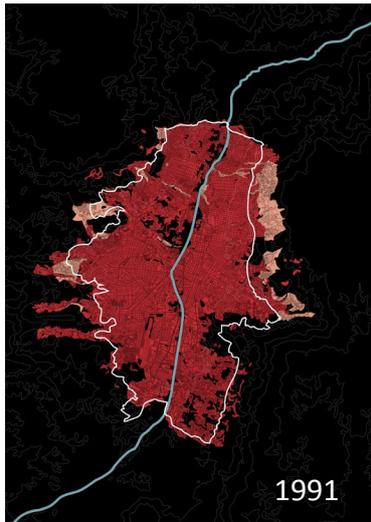
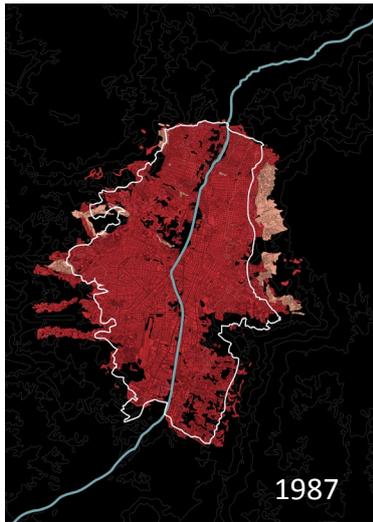
● Informal settlements

▭ Urban perimeters

0 10 km



Chronological Development Plans 1700 - 2014. Author's elaboration.
Sources: various historical maps and Samper 2015.



Chronological Development Plans 1700 - 2014. Author's elaboration.
Sources: various historical maps and Samper 2015.

and charge for the use. Once urban perimeters were readjusted, also roads could be built.

In order to reduce the divisions between the informal communities and the city administration, the *Juntas de acción communal* or JAC (boards of communal action) were created, conceived as neighbourhood scale representation of the Municipality that even had defensive tasks. In most of the cases these structures were simply regularizing forms of governance already existing even though gangs rising power made these institutions symbolic. Different forms of segregations started in 1968 with the new *Reglamento de Urbanización de Planeación Municipal* (Urban Planning Regulations) that introduced gated communities as housing model. This move allowed wealthier citizens to create their self-sufficient urban islands in the South-East, an area known as *El Poblado*.

The 70s most represent the social and economic crisis. By the end of this decade 50 informal settlements



Figure 2. Barrio Santo Domingo in the 60s. Source: Samper 2015

Population growth per year and number of informal population (around 12.5 % each year)		
1985	1.468.089	185.000
1990	1.621.920	N/A
1993	1.630.009	202.500
1997	1.840.975	258.965
2002	2.030.593	302.904
2005	2.216.830	320.000
2006	2.525.902	330.000
2007	2.553.012	340.000
2008	2.580.414	350.000

Table 2. Population growth per year and number of informal population. Data source: DANE

were officially recognized in the city (Torres 2009), mostly distributed in the northern part (known as Comuna 1 with the introduction of the municipal divisions) and many arising in the East, where today stands the Comuna 13 (chronological development map 1970). The centre reached its limits in terms of capacity and degradation, forcing the municipality to plan its recovery. A solution suggested by the *Oficina de Planeación Municipal* (Office for Municipal Planning, officially instituted in 1960) and shared between the forces involved in the planning, was the introduction of a new core that would initially de-densify the original one and create later a unique important hub. The project was inserted in the development plans of the new Metropolitan Area of Medellín that was created in 1975 (Jaramillo 2005).

While the city was focusing its attention in the centre for the interests of few, Medellín cartel and criminal bands were expanding the drug industry by means of corruption, political connections and threats. In the 80s the cartel had the total control of the city and narco-traffic money was mostly invested in the physical development of the city. If the rich were building their high-rise houses and offices, poorer neighbourhoods saw improvements in their livelihoods. One example is the programme *Medellín sin tugurios* from Pablo Escobar that was strategically increasing his political consent by providing housing, recreational and public space and employment. In 1982, he even entered the national congress but expelled two years later for his undeniable links with the narco-traffic market. Since then, his revenge was shocking as unfortunately history reminds us.

Illicit money was also a fortune for the huge public works foreseen by the new Metropolitan plan: in 1980 the city updated the original plan *Piloto*, placing Medellín at the centre of the Antioquian region, a vision that foresaw big infrastructural works to assure an efficient city, especially in terms of transport accessibility. The construction of the Metro in 1984 for example required entire streets to be destroyed and re-aligned and many other roads were built to connect the main parts of the valley. Great resources were also spent for securing the river embankments. The opening of these many construction sites gave the possibility to plan a specific strategy for the centre, fighting degradation and informality by providing quality public space.

As seen in Chapter 1, during the 90s a big shift takes place in the violence scene: urban militias established in the city and criminal bands started a war for the control over the destroyed Medellín cartel. Informal settlements, the unfortunate battlegrounds of these conflicts, were still growing in numbers and reached the 12 % of the total population in 1993 (table 2). The same year counts 180 gangs and 19 Militias groups present, with three thousand 16 years old boys involved in criminal activities (Alvarez 2009). Apart from the escalation of violence, '90s are also important for two reforms at national level. The first was the decentralization of the Colombian institutional system in 1991 that gave more independence in managing their territories and allowed citizens to choose their mayor through popular elections. The second was the *Ley de Desarrollo Territorial* (Ley 388/1997, Territorial law) of 1997, which imposed to all the Colombian municipalities the creation of an urban development plan, known as POT (Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial), that required the participation of the civil society. For the first time precise indications for the expropriation and compensation of land were given too (Samper 2015).

Other changes also came at local level in 1993 when the *Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales en Medellín* (Integral programme for the improvement of subnormal neighbourhoods of Medellín), known as PRI-MED, was created. For the first time the local government was actively involved in the improvement of informal settlements. The programme was divided in two phases (1993-1997 and 1998-2003) and in total 15 neighbourhoods, 9000 houses and 11 thousand families saw the benefits of the interventions (Bentacur 2008). Citizens started participating actively in these development projects and their contribution became important elements for the POT of 1999. Although these structural works informal settlements still did not have stability: 59% of the informal population was unemployed and the 71% of the families in extreme poverty (Alvarez 2009). For the people living in the mountains, with no education and no skills for a formal job, the possibilities to change their lives were limited. As it was not enough, guerrilla and paramilitaries entered the city and were violently controlling the communities and moving wars one against the other. People could not imagine an alternative life after years of violence ruling their life.

In 2002, two important events sign the history of Medellín. The first is the Operación Orion in Comuna 13, when state forces and paramilitaries entered the neighbourhood killing tens of civilians while seeking guerrilla members. This operation symbolizes the end of the political conflict in the city but also signs the loss of faith toward institutions in terms of irresponsible use of violence. The second event is the construction of the famous Metro Cable system in the North-East that will facilitate citizens living in the mountain to move from and to the centre. These last years of physical changes were the fortune of the Urbanismo Social of Sergio Fajardo, Mayor of Medellín from 2004

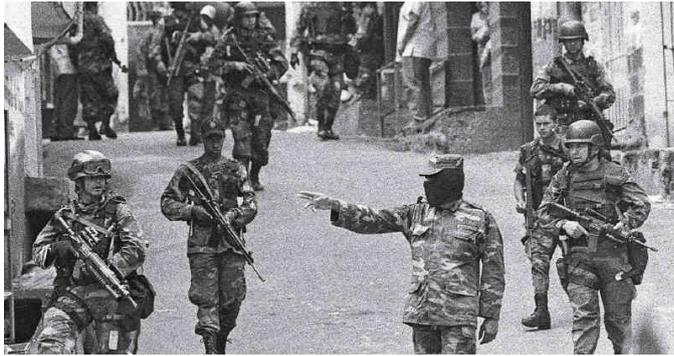


Figure 3. Iconic picture of the Operación Orión: the spy points enemies' refuge. Source: Colombia Informa



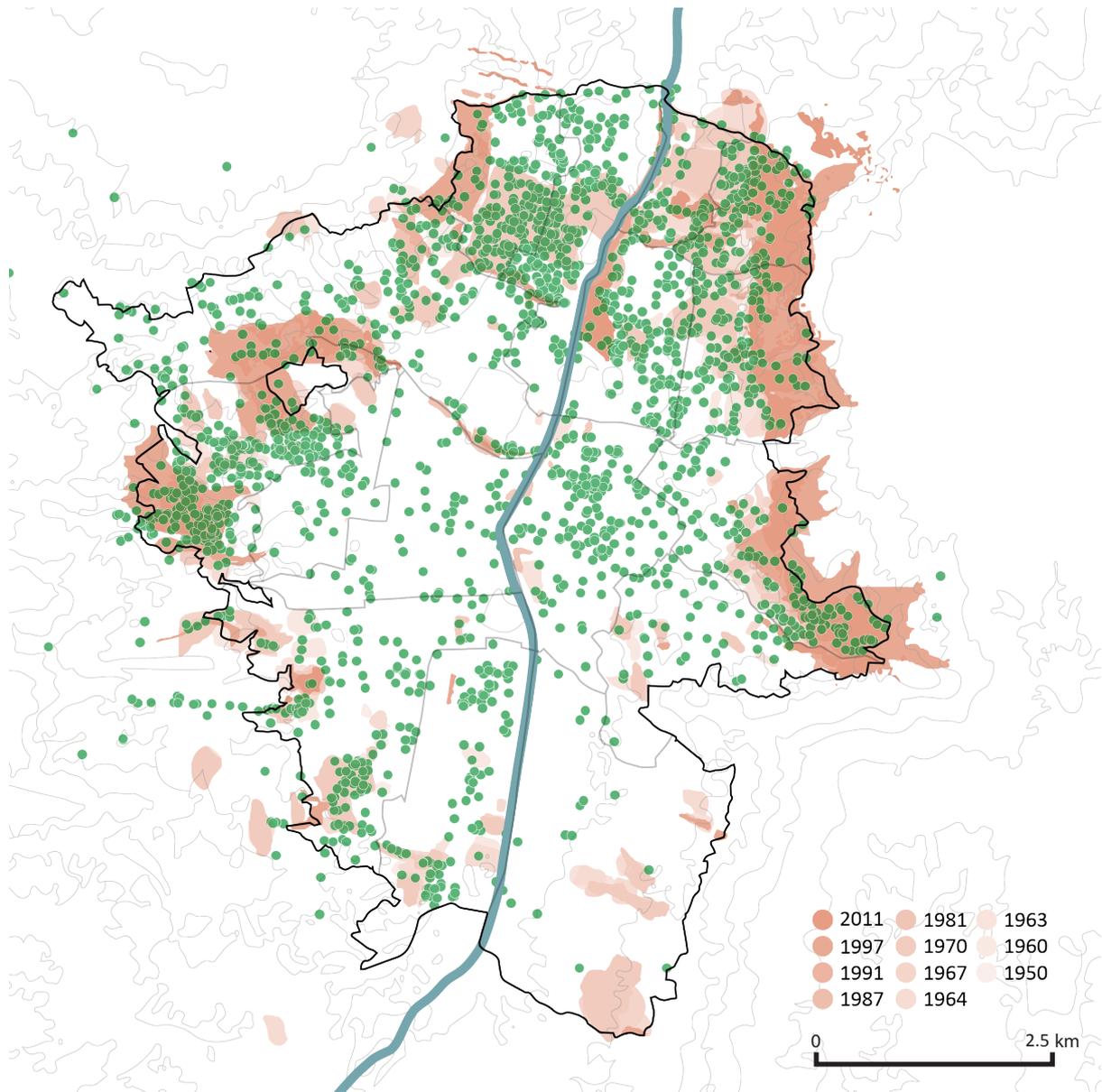
Figure 4. Military front during the Operación Orión. Source: El Espectador

to 2007. The interventions were collected in six *Proyectos Urbanos Integrales* or PUI and taking into account years of exclusions from education, employment and public life. Quality public space and buildings regenerated those neighbourhoods while social and education project, such as *Medellín la mas Educada*, were developed in order to empower the city's human capital. This political change will influence the following administrations over the first decade of years 2000. The success of the Urbanismo Social is today worldwide recognized for its positive impacts in reducing urban poverty by promoting integral development and for the mitigation of the general violent atmosphere. In 2013 Medellín was recognized by the Wall Street Journal as the *most innovative city in the world* for its urban policies but also for its important innovations in the third sector and its cultural offer.

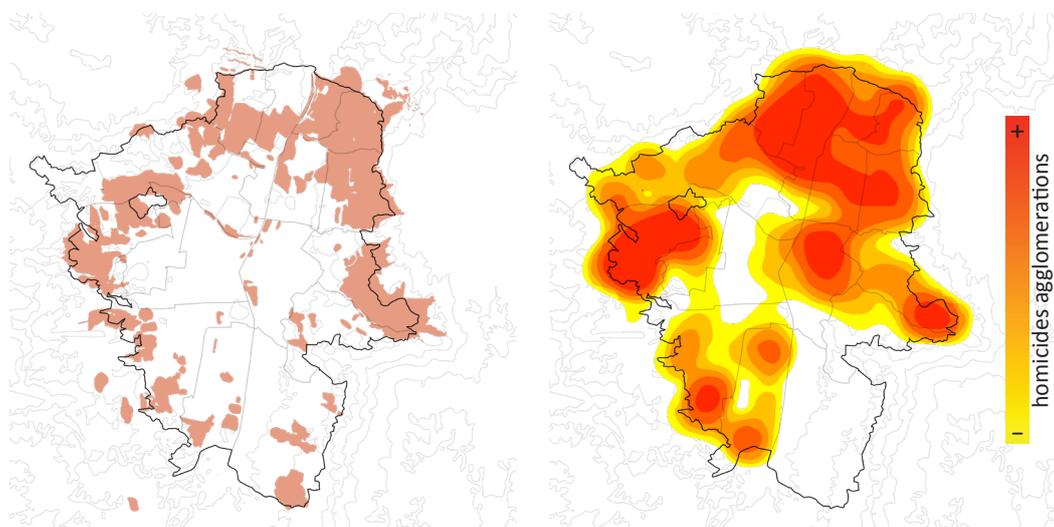
A transversal reading

From what seen so far, it is clear that the history of Medellín had always been a history of powers or *classes* controlling the city and shaping the urban environment according to their interests. The original elite and later the emerging middle-high class, played a big role for the development of entire neighbourhoods, always driven by the desire of having their urban oasis far from the chaotic and dangerous life in the centre. On the opposite side, low-income population never had the possibility to choose their location for living as land-market processes and later violence-driven eviction always forced them to migrate from one neighbourhood to the other. In short, they always had to occupy the marginalized and leftover land where the planning committee had no interest due to natural (unstable hillsides) or economic reason. This narration of contrasts is perceivable in most of the literature on Medellín that show the city not just for its violent past, but also for the duality between two worlds. On one side an aesthetic city with prosperous stores, high-rise offices and innovative economy while on the other a city with big problems of unemployment, hunger, drug addiction, prostitution, violent and political delinquency (Jaramillo 2011).

An important reflection has to be done over the informality management over time. Apart from the Urbanismo Social that faced the issue in its core, the previous solutions and interventions had different approaches. As commented before, the general strategy used was the concession of land tenure and by re-drafting of the urban perimeter including the *new* communities. In this way people was officially recognized as inhabitants of Medellín and a different range of social programmes and funds were available for them. Those who actually used this assistance were just a few as the migration flux did not allow the provision of these services to the majority of the incomers. For those who benefitted, positive



Map 3. Non-State armed actors's homices geolocalized (2009-2016) over the imprint of the informal settlements in time (1950-2011). Author's elaboration. Data Source: Samper 2015 for maps & Alcaldia de Medellín for geodata.



Map 4. Overall informal imprint. Map 5. Kernel Analysis of the homicides geo-data. Author's elaborations.

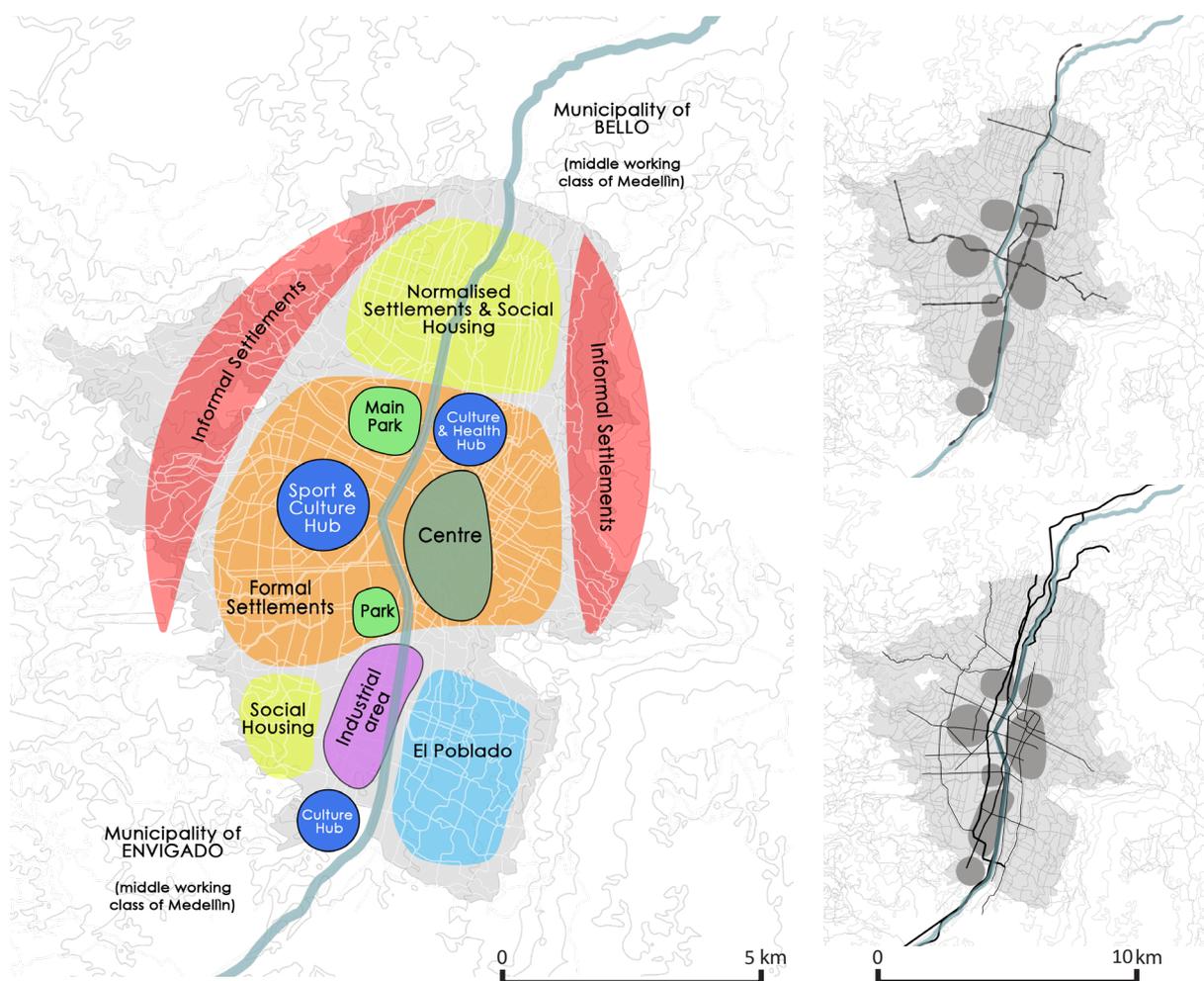
impacts were registered in their livelihood as sanitation and energy connections were provided as long as roads. However, the implementation of the spatial condition was not responding to re-integration or empowering strategies, but just applying a *formal* filter over an informal built environment. This *normalization* was not solving a forgotten list of social and economic problems such as employment, education and among all, security. Gangs were still co-habiting and governing those neighbourhoods fighting between them for the control of space as it happens today but with a different intensity. This evidence is reported in map 3, where the geo-location of armed actors' homicides of the available dataset (2009-2016) is applied on the imprint of the informal settlements over time (1950-2011). Apart from the peak in the centre that will be later discussed, it is clear that if we associate the location of homicides to the presence of gangs, those groups are still today concentrated in the former and current informal environments.

Another contrasting phenomena is the provision of social housing that is actually a worldwide issue public administrations are facing in discussible ways. Any time populations are evicted with the promise of a new house (if it occurs), their relocation is not foreseen in the proximity of their belonging community but might even be in the opposite side of the city. That leads not only to the loss of their social network and identity, but could even worsen their living condition: *"if you sell avocados in the streets for living and they give you a house in a wealthier and more expensive neighbourhood, your possibility to survive are reduced and you end up living again in the slum"* (Interview 2). Another proof comes from the work of Leanne Milton (2018) that collected the story of a family of 18 members moved from Moravia to Nuevo Occidente, a marginalized neighbourhood close to Comuna 13. Their life takes place mostly inside their 70 square meters apartment and *"children do not play outside alone as the area is too dangerous"*. Moreover, *"the family says the city promised parks and programs for the children, but they never came. They often miss their old neighbourhood"*.

This last point reminds another problem in the city construction over time that was the lack of adequate planning and city scale planning. Since their emergence, the different suburbs of Medellín were conceived as islands rotating around a central core and not as environments of a unified urban structure. Additionally, those driving the urban development were not planners but industrial lords, merchants and big land owners just focused on their businesses. The visionary contribution of the Plan Piloto and the first Metropolitan Plan later were not enough to tackle years of urban and social division. In the first case the Plan Piloto struggled to apply its imprint as the challenge of informal settlements limited the building possibilities occupied those lands where interventions were foreseen. In the second, although the infrastructural change aiming to connect the whole city, the social divisions and related interests were too strong to enable the social exchange. During those years the agencies of violence were in the highlight of their power and movement possibilities were limited too. In any case, the Metropolitan Plan aim was not reducing the distance between classes but boosting the economic possibilities of the centre in the regional system and nearing the middle working class that in the meanwhile moved in the neighbouring municipalities included in the metropolitan area. Summing up, if the construction of Medellín civil society as a whole had failed, the lower communitarian-scale identity had not.

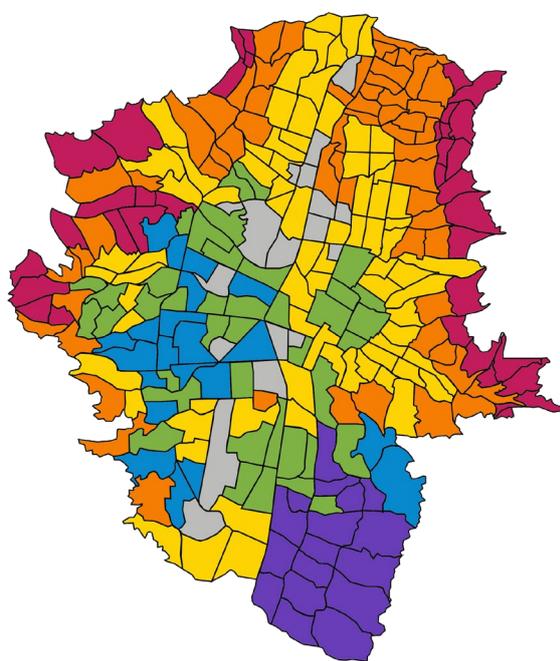
Medellín today

After this excursus over the city' social and building history, understanding what Medellín looks like today becomes easier. Map 6 helps to picture the different urban environments and the main areas of attractions. As partially explained in the previous paragraphs, most of the city's services are condensed in the central North-South axis, reflecting the will of the various metropolitan visions. The planned city takes place in its immediate surrounding while the North is mostly composed by normalized settlements and many social housing projects. Informal settlements are marginalized on the Eastern and West borders while the wealthier class collects in the South-East. Maps 7 and 8 are showing the infrastructural connections through the city in terms of public transport (Metro, Metroplus, Tramvia and Metroclable) and road system. All the networks have the valley-bottom as main hub, where not only the major economic activities are found, but even other city scale services such as hospitals, universities and major sport facilities. These maps are basically showing that no exchange of fluxes in the city occurs as everyone gathers downtown but no one needs to commute in other parts of Medellín. Still today, the narration of satellite and isolated regions floating around a main core is valid. The Municipalities of Envigado and Bello, and even the others included in the metropolitan area, are reinforcing this linear and centralized system with few productive activities next to the river. Mostly they represent the dormitory neighbourhoods hosting the working class of Medellín.



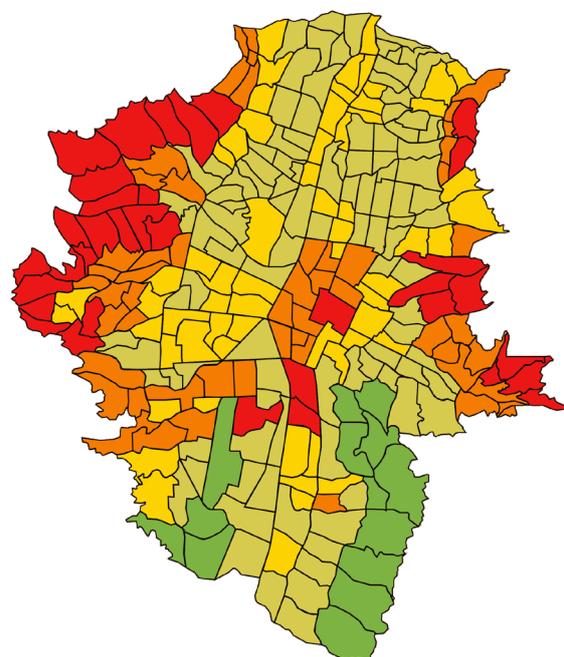
Map 6. Functional zones of Medellín. Maps 7 & 8. Public transport and road network. Author's elaborations.

Map 10 reports the social stratification of the city based on the income level. The classification criteria are regulated by the National Planning Institute and these informations used for tax regulation purposes. Classes from 1 to 3 are those with the lower income who benefit subsidies and some free public services. Categories 5 and 6 represent the wealthier population which are exposed to higher taxation. Class 4 corresponds to the middle class. This distribution clearly reflects the population pattern over time. From the core of the city informal settlements were growing, mostly north, and successively being normalized. Later other migrants came and new settlement created. This continuous addition, gave the possibility to the older communities to improve their livelihood while the newest representing the more vulnerable. The central area, where the formal city is, shows medium and high levels of income, especially on the East, where *Laureles* is, while *El Poblado* is the one with the highest levels. These are the imprints of the historical elite that moved from one neighbourhood to the other permitting the creation of better spatial and social conditions.



- 1 - Low-Low
- 2 - Low
- 3 - Medium-Low
- 4 - Medium
- 5 - Medium-High
- 6 - High

Map 10. Social Stratification of Medellin in 2018.
Data Source: Social Institute of Housing and Habitat
Medellin



- Extreme caution
- High caution
- Elevated caution
- Normal caution
- Low caution

Map 11. Caution levels based on local reports on the prevalence of street crime and violent gang activity.
Data source: Study of Colombia Reports 2019

As mentioned, informal settlements are today the ones with the higher presence of non-State armed groups. Map 11 confirms this circumstance by showing the level of caution inhabitants pay in their neighbourhoods. The study was done by Colombia Reports in 2019, asking people their perception of danger according to criminality and violent activities in their district. Peripheries appear as the most dangerous areas and so does the centre. This behaviour partially mirrors the homicides' location of Map 3. El Poblado again stands out from the rest of the city, where caution levels are lower. The low caution strip on the left is where the airport is located. It is surprising to see that in the legend there are no labels marked as safe.

Perceptions of insecurity

As shown the levels of attention to be paid change according to the different location of the city and the activities of non-State armed groups clearly plays a big role. It is important not to forget that gangs are responsible for nearly half of the homicides in Medellín and other types of crime and actors participate in the creation of insecurity. Sometimes built environment itself can amplify these feelings even though there is not real danger. Decades of violence, open air confrontation and liberalized crime deeply affected people's life and space has collected emotions and fears.

Non-State armed groups have their community as base but move in other districts of the city for their activities. The danger for citizens are minimized in these occasions as violent acts are usually directed to specific targets but still publicly visible: *"everything happens so quickly. Usually a man on a motorbike arrives, shoot or stab his victim and leaves as nothing happened."* (Interview 1). The influence of non-State armed groups within their territory is different. Where the conflict between bands is high, citizens could find themselves in the middle of a battle and sadly be hit by a bullet. Confrontations usually happens during the night but *"they can start shooting any time, even right now where we stand."* (Interview 7).

The constant presence of these actors since the formation of the communities and the memories of years of cruelties leads people to show respect to gangs' members as they are scared of the consequences of not following their rules, such as paying the *vacunas* (tax): *"you do it otherwise you know they will kill you"* (Interview 7). An interesting contrast came later from this interview when the interviewee said she was not feeling unsafe in her neighbourhood (Comuna 13) as she knew her safety was assured simply by following these rules. When discussing on the perception of insecurity there are other variables that needs to be taken into account, as people give and perceives things basing on their own experience and being. For example a street highly unsafe for a woman could be slightly unsafe for a man or vice versa. Back in the days men, especially young adults, were those in major danger as they represented a bigger threat for gangs. Always the interviewee said that because she was a woman, gangs never had any interests in hurting her.

Other considerations came from Interview 4 in Moravia, a neighbourhood where gangs have the total control and there are no armed conflict occurring. In this context streets are perceived as safer compared to formal areas not just because of non-State efficient control but also for their spatial features and the presence of *eyes on the street* (fig. 6): the compact urban structure and the narrow distance between the buildings ensures a closer window-street relationship. Street users feel safer when know someone is watching over them and could eventually help in case of danger. That is not^m the case in El Poblado, where buildings are taller and the eye control on street is reduced. In addition, elements such as gates or vegetation could further limit the visibility as it happens in the central neighbourhood of Prado where the position of the buildings in the lot, the entrance and the trees create a strong visual barrier toward the street (fig. 7). Apart from design aspects, other elements needs to be taken into account such as the community bound that plays a key role in the creation of a safe atmosphere. The relationship between community and non-State actors, as it happens in Moravia, can also become a positive reinforcing element. Those who do not belong to certain environment might instead not feeling the same perceptions, especially if coming from a different urban context or

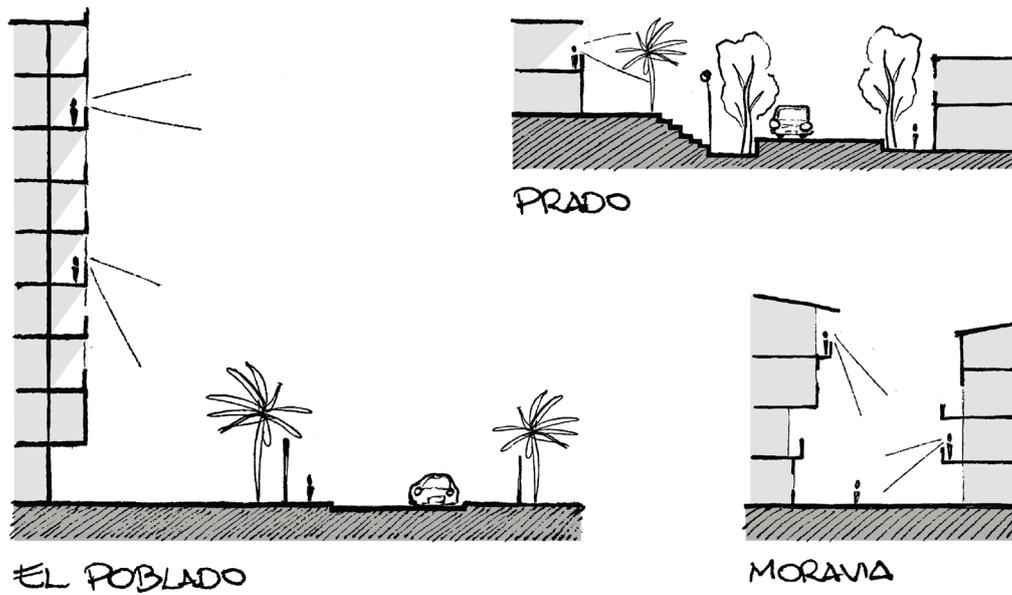


Figure 6. Typical urban sections of three neighbourhood with people's field of view marked: El Poblado, Prado (Centre) and Moravia (Informal settlement). Author's sketches.

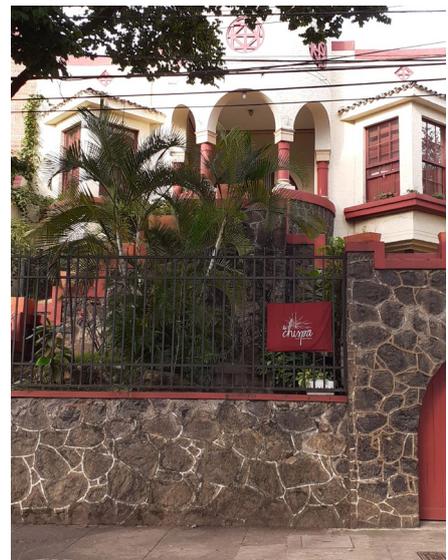


Figure 6. Eyes control on the street, Moravia; Figure 7. Trees covering the view from the house to the sidewalk, Prado Centro. Author's pictures.



Figure 8. Isolated and potentially dangerous sidewalk in El Poblado; Figure 9. Residential towers in El Poblado lost their relationship with the street; trees also cover the view. Author's pictures.

social class (social stigmatizations toward space can influence the overall experience of security). The presence of activities at ground level is another important variable, not only for the single merchant presence, but for the fluxes of people a series of stores can generate and maintain the street lively.

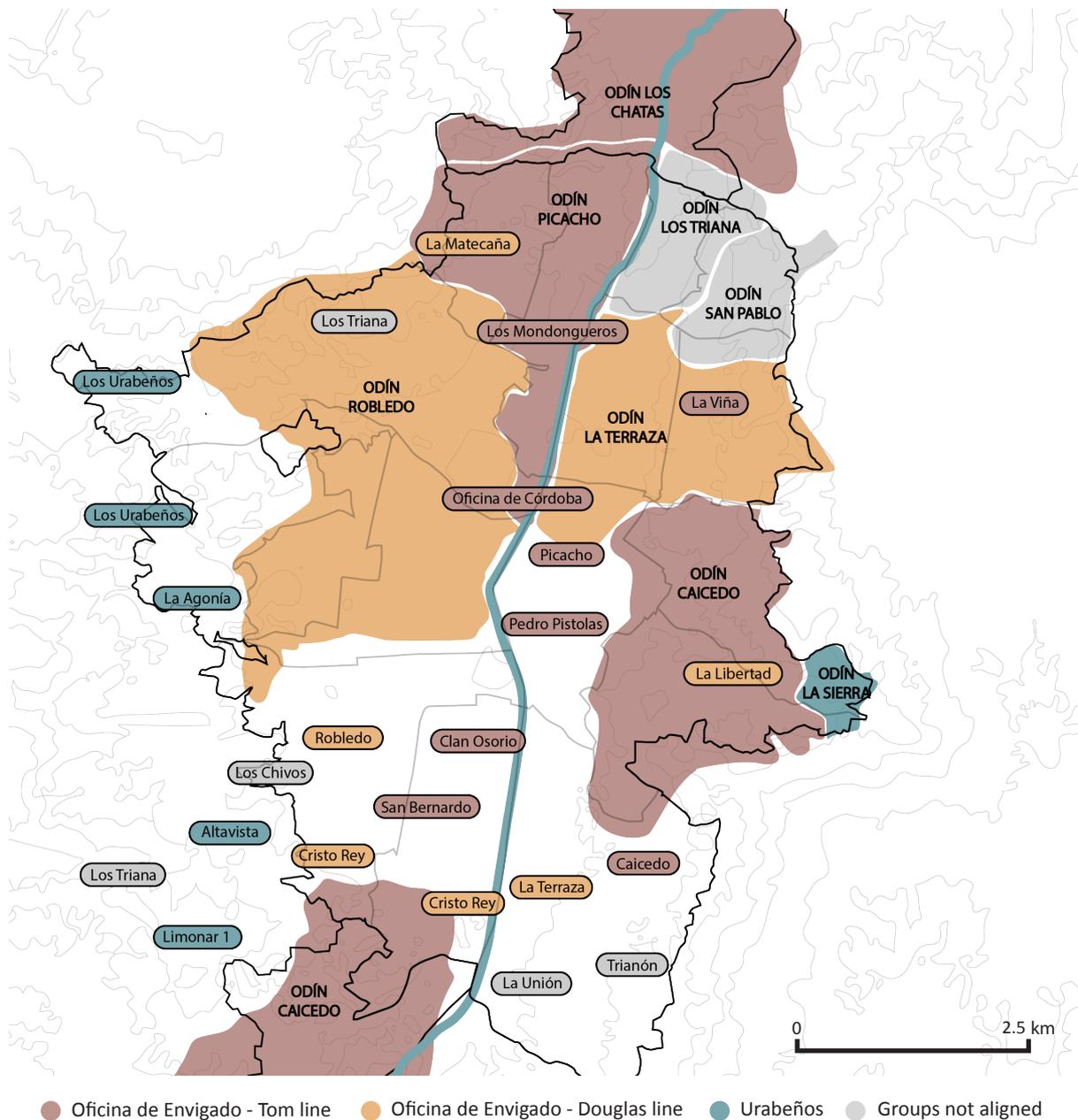
Security in the public space also needs to be contextualized in the time-frame people move: with the sunlight and the fluxes of people unfolding in the street, users feel safe but when the night comes and the amount of people decreases, the attention to be paid arises consequently. Extra-measures drive the route choice from one location to the other, especially if going out late. People organize to move in groups and walking distances are minimized for safety reason: paying a ticket even for a couple of stops by public transport is preferred and when no options are available, on-demand pick up taxis (Uber) are called. When on foot, crowded streets are generally chosen but the presence of people does not necessary means safety: anyone can turn having bad intentions and you could find yourself threaten for money. Clearly those owning private transport are excluded from these dynamics but their risk becomes having their car stolen. The absence of street parking and the huge amount of private parking services in the city does not surprise.

Conclusion

So far, we have seen that the growth of Medellín has always been driven by different powers, economic or political, pushing the formal development of some areas while leaving the mountains to informality. Still today, this contrast is spatially reflected in the different income levels of the city: poor on the edges, middle class in the centre and rich in El Poblado. The perception of danger increases moving in the periphery and the presence of gangs surely has its influence but in any location of the city everyone with bad intention could represent a treat. Built environment itself plays a big role in amplifying this feeling and, paradoxically, the street design of the safest areas is actually the worst to guarantee security in the public space. According to different criteria, the next chapter will deeply analyse the physical and social conditions of different settlement, trying to delineate those elements composing the urban *atmospheres* and the self-protection strategies of each *world*.

Chapter 3 – Urban atmospheres

So far, we have seen how the history of the city has created environments completely different each other and how neighbourhood-scale foams were affected in their development by inner or outer agents modifying their atmospheres. This influence manipulated not only the imaginary of the outer world, but even shaped the perception and the security needs of communities. As said, in some areas the presence of gangs means safety and the use of violence legitimate while in others their oppression is unsustainable. Additionally, State does not represent a reliable actor as sometimes corrupted and others the first in abusing of its power. Leaving oneself bubble and belonging foam becomes then the

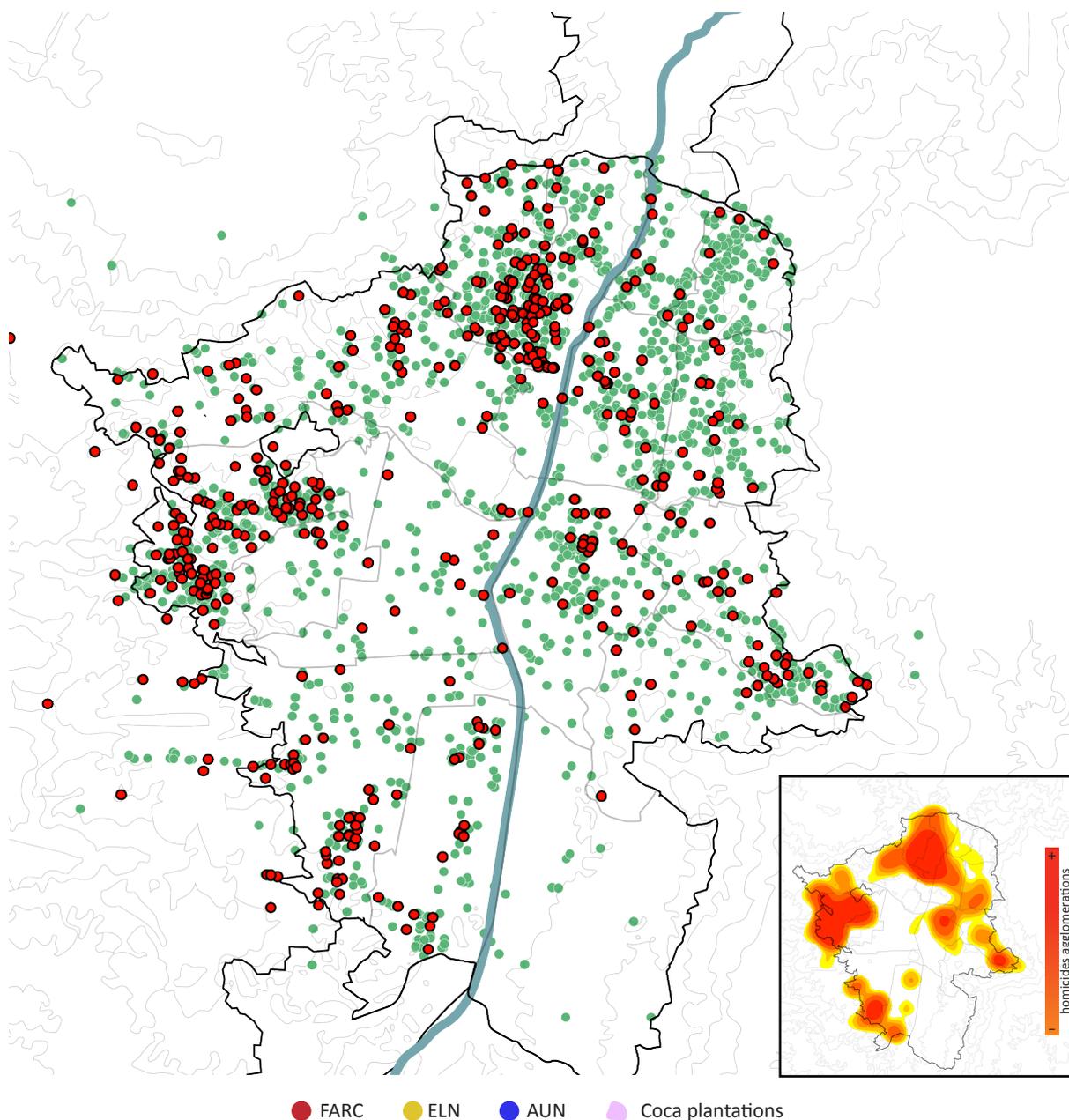


Map 1. Political map of the underworld in 2017: local gangs location and BACRIM affiliation/areas of influence. ODÍN: Organización Delincuencia Integrada al Narcotráfico. Author's elaboration. Data source: El Colombiano (2017)

moment people expose themselves to the *threats* of the outer world and no security guaranteed. Considering physical, social and governance conditions this chapter will try to describe the current urban atmospheres of ten neighbourhoods of the city.

Medellín non-State armed groups' dynamics 2011-2017

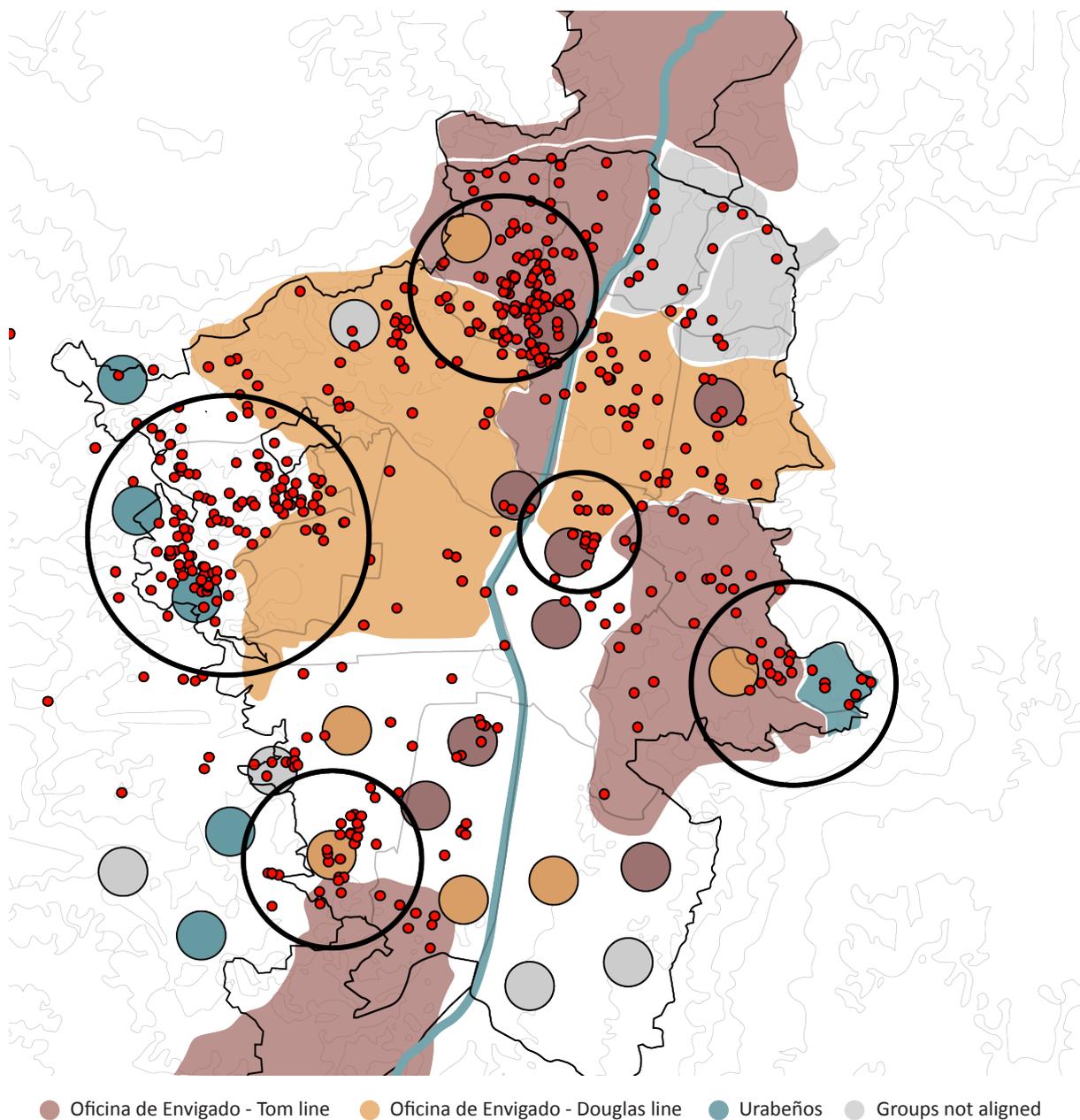
The different urban environments reflect certain socio-economic conditions historically built. Although just with these informations we could actually define the corresponding urban landscapes of Medellín, it would not be enough to define the foams in their atmosphere. In fact, we have seen that the presence of other *imagined communities* created social and governance conditions that redesign the geographies of power in the city primarily by means of violence. One neighbourhood could even have two or more laws at the same time, depending on the number of gangs fighting in the same location.



Map 2. Non-State armed groups' homicides. In red those where a combatant was killed. Map 3. Kernel analysis of combatants as victims. Author's elaboration. Data Source: Municipality of Medellín

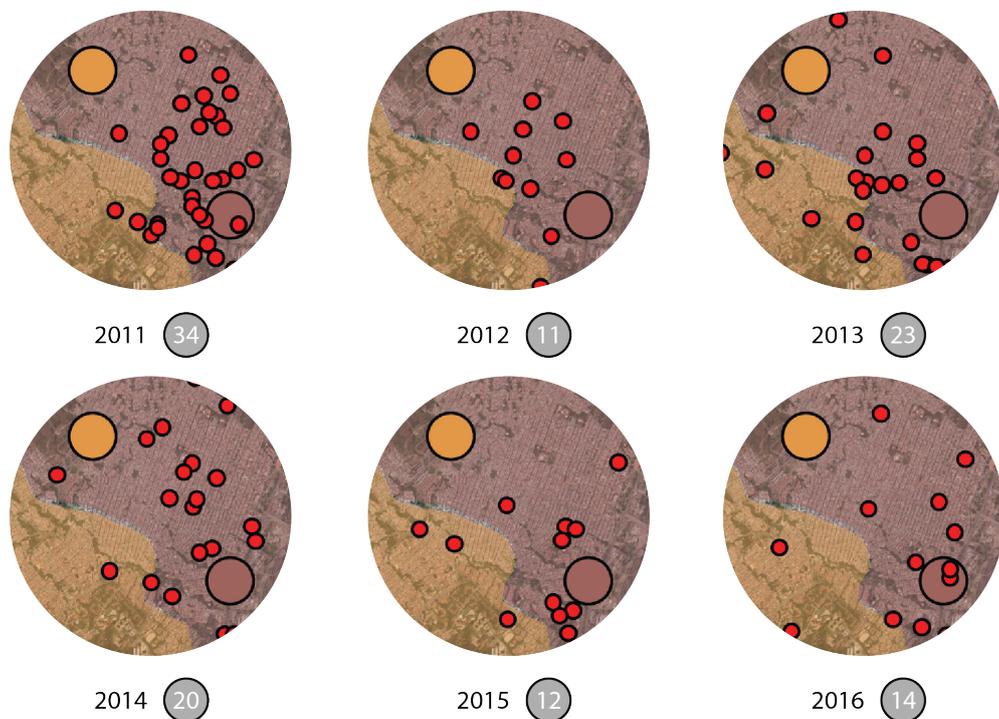
Recalling chapter one, groups divide between local urban gangs and supra-local criminal organizations (BACRIM) that operate on different scales. A study made from the newspaper *El Colombiano* and shown in Map 1, reports the distribution of armed groups in 2017 taking into consideration these divisions. Urban bands are present in the whole city and almost all of them are connected to higher criminal organizations. The Oficina de Envigado and the Urabeños are the ones currently splitting Medellín and signed a non-attack pact in 2013. The Oficina controls the North of Medellín from Bello, and is divided in two lines, *Línea de Tom* and *Línea de Douglas*, that reached truce just in May 2019 after years of mutual offensives (Análisis Urbano 2019a). Urabeños or paramilitaries are few in the South and stronger in the West and the East, dominating La Sierra.

Other important key information come from the ArcGIS database. Map 2 shows the geo-localized homicides committed by non-State armed groups between 2011 and 2016, highlighting those where



Map 4. Homicides between non-State armed groups over the political divisions of the underworld. Agglomerations circled. Author's elaboration. Data Source: Municipality of Medellín and *El Colombiano* (2017)

combatants were killed. Reasonably agglomerations show the war fronts, mostly condensed in informal settlements, while voids indicates the absence of conflicts. The main clusters are West, where Comuna 13 is, and North-West. Smaller ones are found East and South while in the centre there is a quite even distribution. No disputes registered on the South East. Map 4 allows to read these dynamics over the political divisions. The agglomerations of deaths emerge where different violent agencies meet. Where there are no conflicts, groups have the total control or respect each other's legacy. The two



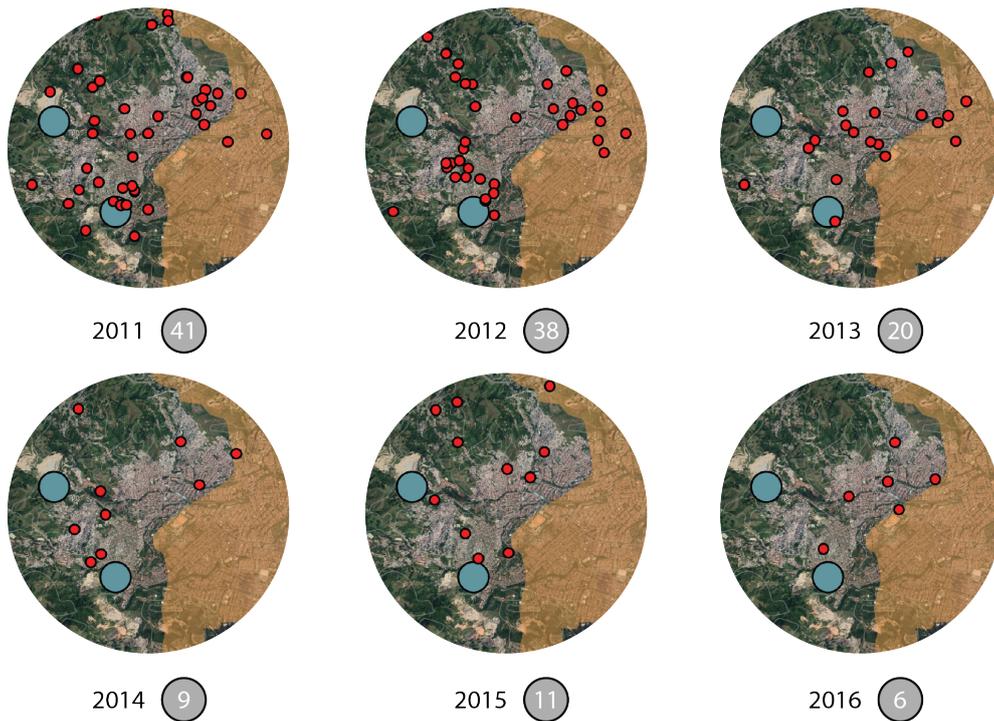
Sequence 1. Development of groups' war by year and number of death in Comuna 5. Personal Elaboration

0 3 km

major clusters unfold relevant observations when analysing them by year.

According to the political divisions, in the first sequence the two factions of the Oficina are engaged in a conflict. In the images, the agglomeration pattern seem to be directed towards the Tom controlled group, decreasing in consistency during the years. Eventually Tom faction was able to defence or to conquer the control of that location, which correspond to the bus terminal.

In sequence 2, the war is between Paramilitaries and Oficina. The two fronts are clearly visible in 2012, where the deaths cluster in two lines: the one on the left follows the border of the last risen informal settlement known as *La Independecia*. The *Pacto de Fusil* of July 2013 (Análisis Urbano 2019b) represents an important moment for the decrease of violence. In the same year, just 1 homicide was registered after July and numbers are lower in the following years. These deaths could eventually represent some accounts settling or independent fights between local gangs.

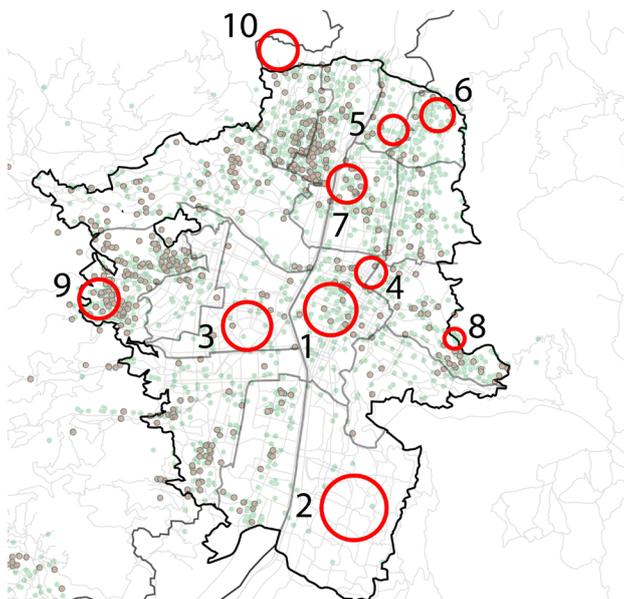


Sequence 2. Development of groups' war by year and number of death in Comuna 13. Personal Elaboration



Classifying urban atmospheres

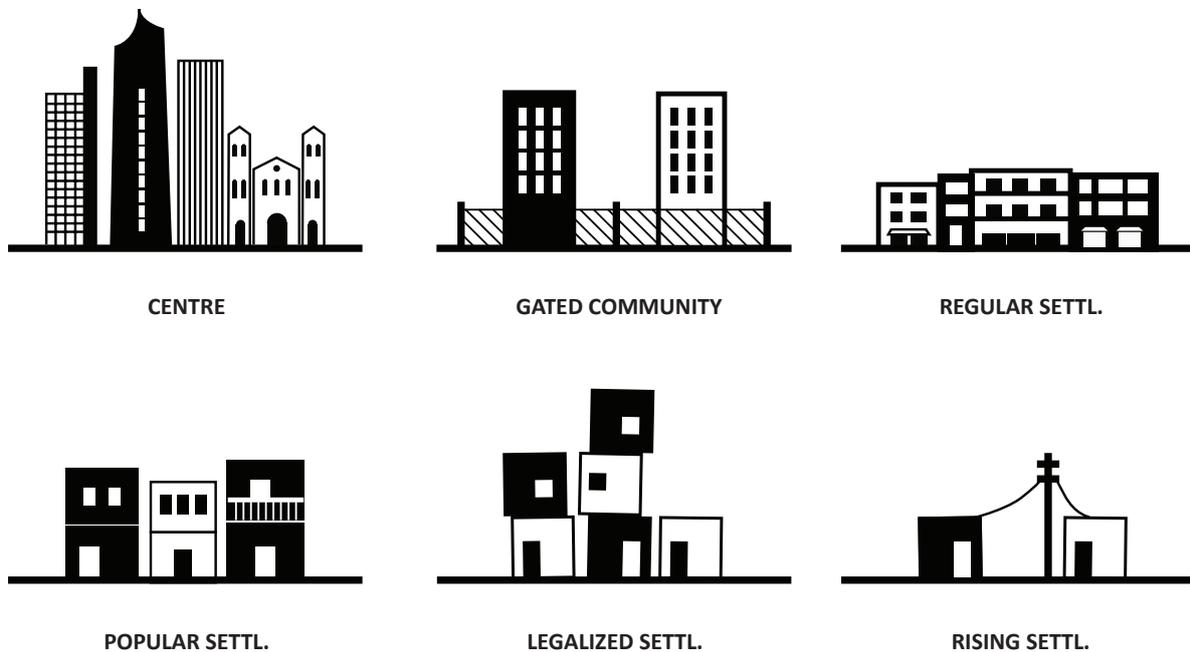
All the layers analysed become now important to describe Medellín atmospheres, especially because those reported were the closest situation to what the city looked like during my visit. For each of the ten neighbourhood analysed, an annex at the end of the chapter provides more documentation (photos, maps, further details). For the classification of the *worlds* as socio-spatial entities, two criteria must be recognized: the first is the urbanscape that characterized the area and also gives us information about the social stratification. The second is the political state ruling in those neighbourhoods and the dynamics groups exert on the territory.



1. Centre
2. El Poblado
3. Laureles
4. Prado Centro
5. Santa Cruz
6. Santo Domingo
7. Moravia
8. Villatina
9. Comuna 13
10. Nueva Jerusalén

Map 5. Analysed neighbourhoods

Urban forms are divided in six classes: centre, gated community, regular settlement, popular settlement, legalized settlement and rising settlement. Referring to map 10 of the previous chapter, the first three refers to planned forms of urbanization and collect social stratification classes number 4, 5 and 6, while the second three are linked with informality and refer to social stratification class number 1, 2 and 3.



For the typology of power armed groups exert on the territory and the political state, the classification was possible just matching the information of the dataset with the on-site interviews and visits. Four conditions were defined: control, dominion, conflict and eviction.

<p style="text-align: center;">CONFLICT</p> <p>Neighbouring armed groups are fighting in small scale areas discussing each other sovereignty. State forces hardly enters these environments: they might pay groups to be calm.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVICITION</p> <p>Non-State armed groups provide basic services in communities where State forces are trying to evict the inhabitants.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">CONTROL</p> <p>Non-State armed groups are not part of the communities but manage to develop a relationship with them for the exploitation of their resources. State forces, if present, are complicit.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DOMINION</p> <p>Non-State armed groups are part of these communities and their sovereignty preserved in time or not discussed by other groups. State forces are present around public buildings.</p>

Formal areas

The majority of the formal areas are found in the bottom of the valley and on the South East. They all fall within the *control* condition: non-State armed groups do not belong to these environments but want to take advantage of their economic possibilities. Referring to map 2, conflicts between bands are not present but civilians killed, especially in the centre. Bands activities are mostly linked to drug-trafficking, smaller crimes and security assistance. However, each urbanscape has its particularities.

- **Centre**

The centre (Annex 1) is a collection of chaotic environments where flows of workers and cars make the space alive during the day and consequentially safe. Economic activities are evenly distributed through avenues, small commercial centres, street stores and popular markets. Social degradation is strongly visible. Rag pickers collect recyclable material from every wastebasket and many people beg for money in the major junctions. Street dwellers are lying in the less trafficked areas and most of them are drug-addicted expelled from their communities (Interview 8). During the night, the situation is completely different. Apart from few unconnected spots where young people gather (theatres, bars), there is nothing to do Downtown and no one lives here exception made from homeless. By this time people do not feel comfortable going out as micro-criminality (pickpocketing, threats for money) seems to be a quite diffuse practice as many of the interviewers confirmed. They, or someone close to them, directly experienced attacks, and not just during the night: *“I was walking at 8 am close to the Metro station when two guys came and threat me with a knife for money”* (Interview 6). When I asked if there was people around him, the interviewee replied: *“Yes, but in these situations no one helps you”*. Non-State armed groups might be responsible for these crimes even though their main business is extortion, drug transfer and selling. Offices, banks and commercial centres all have private security and sometimes even public institutions. Police units are present during the day in the main public spaces but not really during the night. By this time they station at the edges of the centre where the main roads are.

- **Gated Community**

This urban form is typical of El Poblado (Annex 2) and organized as a sequence of individual self-independent neighbourhoods where everything is private and enclosed. Street views are static, composed just by empty perimeter walls, electric gates and bushes. No one is walking here as the neighbourhood was not conceived to cover routes by foot: people use public transport or private vehicles. Residential complexes are many and so are the high-rise office buildings. Commercial centres are the public space for excellence and people gather here not just to spend their free time. They also meet in these locations for business or to use facilities such as gyms or private medical offices. Non-State formal security is at the entrance of every typology of building, private or public. The business opportunity for non-State armed groups are then limited, and they condense toward the central axis of the city where a strip of economic and entertainment facilities becomes the perfect environment for drug-selling and extortion. This area is famous for its nightlife and many are the tourists or the expats living or going out here (locals call this area *“Gringoland”*). Police patrols are present, especially in the night: *“I had to cross El Poblado by foot because the Metro was closed. Police stopped me four times asking me what I was doing there”* (Interview 8).

- **Regular Settlements**

This category applies to the planned areas surrounding the centre. In Laureles (Annex 3) economic activities are organized in continuous patterns and flows of people maintain streets alive between residential blocks and townhouses. The presence of city scale functions such as the Bolivarian University and the Sportive Hub also play a big role in attracting people from the whole city. Stores are open until late in the primary roads and many are the leisure activities during the night. Police is present most of the time with cars or on foot and some residential buildings rely on private security services. In this area, non-State armed groups' major income is drug-selling.

A different situation is found in Prado, a dormitory neighbourhood close to the economic centre (Annex 4). The area can be described as an alternation of historical villas and low townhouses with sporadic economic activities. Pedestrian presence in the street is minimal even though different cultural activities bring people together in private buildings. Because of its proximity to the centre, rag pickers and street dwellers are many and people pay more attention when walking during the night. The security of this area is guaranteed by local gangs that demand *vacunas* to the few activities present (approx. 30 US dollars per week) and even exploit their clients. For example when theatre's events attract people that commute by car, actors become parking valets and charge for the service. Generally, they do not have a fixed position in the neighbourhood and monitor the streets moving around walking or by motorbike. Police usually takes a patrol route during the night and a whistle could announce their arrival if something particularly illicit is going on. Even police make a discussable use of the area. It happens that when someone is making troubles in the surrounding neighbourhoods, such as drunken person, police intervene, load him in their car and leave him in the street with a kick on his back.

In general, non-State armed groups do not represent a life-danger for civilians in formal areas, unless they become targets for some reason. The presence of formal security is high, both public and private, but State forces seem to be resized. In this call for protection also building elements and entire architectures become defensive tools: electrified fences and windows bars are found in most of the buildings, from stores to houses. Gated communities represent instead real barricaded environments where park, shops and other kinds of services are enclosed within perimeter walls and private security approving the access of people and goods. In this scenario, the possibilities of gangs are limited, and they take partial advantage where State forces are weaker but not absent.

Informal areas

All the settlements in these categories had to deal with informality at certain stages of their development. They allocate mostly in sloping areas, even in the highest part of the mountains where conditions are precarious.

- **Popular neighbourhoods**

This urban typology is common in the northern side, where slopes are still low as closer to the valley-bottom. The origins of these settlements are linked with the first migratory waves of the 50s due to regional violence and in the 60s, after the institution of the *Instituto de Credito Territorial*, big infrastructural works reshaped completely the area in order to provide standardized low-income

housing. With basic infrastructures built and many land voids, informality sprout and self-construction created compact districts from the main roads.

In Santa Cruz (Annex 5) the original settlers were migrants able to sell their belonging in the countryside and built their new houses in the city (Interview 15). Housing size in fact is bigger than average informal-houses, mostly because of two reasons: the first is the economic possibility while the second is the availability of space inhabitants had when they first came here. After years of State eviction attempts and armed groups domination, this neighbourhood was labelled as the *“incubator of criminals”* as most of the young people living here felt in the industry of violence. Although the situation has drastically quieted down today, non-State groups are still present today and their *dominion* varies according to the underworld dynamics and collisions: *“last curfew was last year. Going out after the set time is a risk, they might even kill you”*.



Figure 1: Aerial historical picture of neighbourhoods Santa Cruz, Villa Niza and La Francia. 1967. Source: Samper 2015;
Figure 2: Same neighbourhoods of Picture 1 as they appear today. Source: Google Maps 2019.

- **Legalized neighbourhoods**

These neighbourhoods are born from scratches as informal but *normalized* with the expansion of the urban borders. Exception made for some central settlements, they all started as distributed rural houses but their densification created confused and irregular patterns. Most of them were part of upgrading programmes and land tenure legalized through the years after strong infrastructural interventions, some more successful than others. The influences non-State armed groups have in these environments are different.

In Santo Domingo (Annex 6) for example, there are no wars among groups but many are the civilians killed by them when looking at the map, at least until 2016. We could read this behaviour as violent *dominion*, when the strong control of non-State armed groups eliminates dissidents or execute people on commission. In these marginalized communities, the population might rely on bands for justice as they do not trust police nor the formal justice system: *“If your husband beats you and you go to the police you know nothing is going to happen. If you go to them you know something will happen. Violence justifies violence”* (Interview 9). According to interview 3, groups main interest today limits to drug-selling and they are theoretically disarmed after the DDR process of 2008. The neighbourhood had a strong history of violence:

“They could kill people for no reasons, or just because they assumed they were spies of other groups. When going out I used to walk with my face looking down, trying to avoid everyone’s sight because I

was scared they would see me talking to someone they did not know. [...] One of them once threatens me for no reasons. I went talking to the duro (band boss) and I explained what happened and he told me not to worry. I had his protection and actually no one ever came back to me.”

This last evidence opens further considerations over bands social control. Being part of the community, groups know everyone’s life and movements as they were grown with them in the same urban spaces. However, people had to explain why commuting in other barrios if asked and eventually request for permissions. This oppressive form of dominance is no longer existing today: *“they just care about their plazas”*. This change is perceivable in the neighbourhood. At least in the primary roads, people feel confident walking in the streets and younger gather in the main public spaces, something not possible a couple of decades back. Policemen are present in the surrounding of the metro-cable station.

Another example of dominion is found in Moravia (Annex 7), a settlement at the valley-bottom and closer to centre. This place used to be the dumping site of the city but many migrants made of rubbish their income source and built their community here. As other cases, many were the State eviction attempts but people resistance and cohesion saved the settlement. The sense of community is perceivable when walking inside: streets are alive. Children are running everywhere, elderly play chess in public spaces and many are the commercial activities and dining places. Gangs are present here and contribute actively in making the environment efficient: *“They even replace the bulbs of the street lamps as soon as they get damaged.”* (Interview 4) Police presence is low and limited to the Cultural Centre.

The neighbourhoods under siege are different. In Villatina (Annex 8) for example the whole atmosphere of the place mirrors this situation. The presence of people in the street is low and stores limit to basic services with few dining places close to the bus stop. Especially where the current *frontera invisible* is set, people tend to remain in their houses for safety but still maintain an eye relationship with the street from the windows.

“In this neighbourhood police do not enter. They are rarely seen here and if they do is just to negotiate with gangs. The whole system is corrupted here. People trust gangs. Just here, the barrio La Libertad was built with the help of M-19. In this way their power was legitimized. They got people to trust them by helping to build houses. [...] No one here trusts the police. For the State it is easier to treat with them rather than attacking them. That is the only possibility to guarantee security and keep an apparent peace. Negotiations are made at the sunlight, in front everyone’s eyes. In this way State is actually financing gangs: they call it recycled war here in Colombia. [...] Security here is guarantee just by gangs. Their control is super-efficient. Do you see these children that just walked through? They are gangs’ members checking what we are doing here.” (Interview 9)

Comuna 13 (Annex 9) is also a belligerent neighbourhood but shows a total different situation. After the interventions of the Urbanismo Social and the local resilient attempts, tourism has become the strategy to re-launch the place. Many Colombians and foreigners travel here for the so called *graffiti tour*, a chance to visit this dangerous neighbourhood hypothetically out of war and today famous for its hip-hop culture and works of art produced by local artists. This *disneyfication* hides the offensives still going on and the influence of gangs that keeps exploiting the resources of the community (around 20 US dollars each week per tour operator). According to the interview 7, battles usually take place

in the night each fifteen or twenty days and the set *fronteras invisibles* just limits gangs' members. The fluxes of visitors make the place safe during the day along the tourist path, where locals opened a series of themed shops under the payment of *vacunas*. Few policemen are found along the track.

- **Rising neighbourhoods**

This is the case of Nueva Jerusalén (Annex 10), a neighbourhood in the South-West Bello but reachable just through barrio Paris of Medellín. A small bridge connects the two areas limiting the access possibilities only to foot and motorbikes. The settlement was born in 2008 and its rapid growth has left few land voids today. Streets are unpaved and houses small, generally made out of bricks or wood. State is absent in any form here (apart from subsidies in rare cases) and gangs provide basic services such as water and energy with pirate and precarious connections (they also collect rubbish and differentiate it: selling it to specific private companies means income). The conflict in Nueva Jerusalén is between State and community. The municipality tried many times to offer subsidies for leaving or housing alternatives but sources are not enough to live somewhere else or the promised housing not built yet. With previous notice, military forces evicted some inhabitants but just few were the people actually expelled each time and houses easily re-built. The municipality of Bello struggles to allocate resources for the urban upgrade as the settlements is outside the urban perimeter borders so it does not exist on official documents. In addition, geological risk here is extremely high and small landslides have already occurred. (Cano 2017, Jaramillo 2019).

In informal communities, State control is clearly limited and police presence allowed just in public spaces such as stations, community centres or where tourism influence needs formal protection. The relationship between the community and the bands also reinforce this isolation from formal power. State hardly obtained people's trust because of its failure in providing a decent livelihood and for the many eviction attempts. Back in the days military forces were tearing down structures, arresting community members and burning houses while gangs, in some occasions, were instead able to build a bond with the community, occasionally based on fear but others based on a mutual complicity: *"In these contexts people do not care on powers, but they trust who feed them and to them they remain faithful"* (Interview 10). In any case they conduct their operations undisturbed, sometimes even supported by the State that is forced to finance them in order to assure citizen safety. As long as people respect gangs rules and do not oppose resistance, their safety is guaranteed. The access of civilian in these areas might still be restricted in extreme cases. Sometimes police blocks stops people for security checks while others are gangs themselves not to allowed civil strangers to enter the community. When certain visitors are coming, inhabitants might pick them up at the entrance or eventually guide them around to show gangs they are not unexpected threats:

"The first day I started working in a school of barrio La Cruz, children told me to take a tour together around the barrio so that they (bands) would have seen me and understood what I was doing there." (Interview 12)

Non-State armed groups' spaces

It is clear how social and governance conditions facilitate the maintenance of power and control of armed group but what about the spatial conditions?

In formal areas, the urban structure place combatants in even spatial conditions but the numbers of legal forces is higher. That limits the activities of groups even though they still have some form of control as *plazas* or patrolling those spaces where police presence is weak. The situation is different in informal settlements where non-State armed groups have the total social and turf control. Moreover, they have an exclusive knowledge of the settlement spaces as they grew in them. State was never in the conditions to properly map these environments and hardly knows how to move inside. The spatial elements that indirectly can play an active role in the exertion of their power are the following:

- **Location and morphological conditions.**

As informal settlements developed on higher latitudes, visibilities opportunities increase. From here armed groups achieve a privileged point of view over the valley and can easily control who is coming. Members can also station in various point along the access path and update each other.



Figure 3: View from barrio XIII de Noviembre overlooking the valley. Major streets are clearly visible and so are those coming along the slope.

- **Accessibility**

The access to informal settlements is possible just through few main roads. These communities are dead end satellite regions with respect to the city as physical environmental conditions limit their connections. With block stations, actors can decide who enters and who does not, limiting the exchange possibilities of people and goods. If this condition allows groups to defend themselves, it can overturn in a disadvantage when enemies block roads to avoid their escape. During the Operación Orion military blocked the access road of Comuna 13 with cars and no one was in the conditions to leave the neighbourhood (Interview 7). Civilians too were trapped within the war.

- **Urban layout and density**

The dense and narrow structure of informal settlements have limited physical and visual possibilities if compared to formal regular ones. The urban layout becomes a labyrinth for whom does not belong here and foreigners might feel trapped by the space itself. That is not the case for those who instead live here or provides security using the urban structure as an advantage, especially during a battle. The place has to be read in its three-dimensionality for its reduced distances between different heights levels and for the nature of its intricate system of passages. Low roofs become key locations for control, attack and escape and other urban shortcuts (private houses, hidden corridors) could also connect streets on different levels.



Map 6: Urban pattern of barrio *El Socorro*. Map 7: Urban pattern of *Laureles*. Sources: Google Maps



Figure 4: View of La Sierra from the Metrocable station. The tridimensionality of the place clearly facilitate non-State armed actors. Figure 5: View from the inside of La Sierra. Balconies, low roofs and tiny passages are strategic elements helping non-State groups to control the space. Source: Author's pictures

Apart from the settlement physical conditions, armed groups use or create particular spaces to control territories and to conduct their activities. With the support of the interviews and the site visits, it was possible to identify some of them. Each settlement does not necessarily own all of them.

- **Plazas**

These are the spots non-State armed actors use for drug-selling. In informal areas they allocated in bigger open spaces or in visible locations on the most trafficked streets. Neighbouring bands know each other plazas and are meant to respect those belonging to the others. Plazas are present also in the formal city, sometimes far from the eyes of the police and other times supported by their complicity. Plazas could also work as checkpoints.

- **Checkpoints**

Checkpoints are the key spots for surveillance and access. Members are stationed nearby road junctions or surrounding the main open spaces, preferably on heights such as roofs or watersheds. These positions allow them to have greater visuals for the control of space.

- **Places of power**

In these locations non-State armed groups publicly exert their power in form of gatherings, punishments, social justice, and other kinds of crimes such as rape. These places are the strongest physiologically speaking in the construction of fear. People can understand groups' rituals during their daily routine or see the consequences of not respecting their law. Places of power generally locate in the inner part of the settlements where larger open and trafficked spaces are in order to publicly show their law.



Fig 5: ELN Members controlling access. Source: La FM.com; Fig. 6: Interview 7 remembers how, before the football field installations, groups used this spot to execute people. Author's picture.

- **Private spaces**

Members could enter people's houses for personal or illicit goods' protection but even for a meal. People just obeyed as they know what the consequences would be. When houses have backyards, groups could use them as urban shortcuts.

- **Urban voids**

Voids are unclaimed and obsolete spaces in the immediate surroundings of the settlement or along its development path. Stronger and hidden violent acts happen here far from the community's eye but still meaningful in the construction of fear.

- **Fronteras Invisibles**

Fronteras invisibles are the hot borders between groups' territories. Wars start when members discuss each other legacy. If back in the days even civilian could risk their life in crossing a border, today the danger is reduced. Today offensives rarely happen during the day but battles are unpredictable in terms of occurrence. It is important also to remember that the perimeter of groups' influence is not constrained to the physical borders of a neighbourhood. Their political geography is constantly changing between main and secondary roads.

A couple of interesting rumours (Interview 3) allows us to make further considerations on group's spatial influence outside the neighbourhood.

- **Public transport**

We already saw that mobility services, especially taxis, used not to cover specific routes as they were scared of entering certain areas, a circumstance that still exists today where tensions are high. The situation is different when public transport is a vital part of the community. Buses connecting marginal neighbourhoods, benefit the protection of those groups controlling those areas. This allows us to make two important considerations. The first is that civilian still rely on groups' protection when leaving their world and that feeds the community-non-State groups complicity in terms of security. The second is the fluidity of group's control spaces that in this case become moving delegation not to be attacked: *"No one would attack a bus for money when they know paramilitaries have the control on it. It could happen one member is taking a ride on one of them"*.

- **Specific buildings or activities**

Groups control can be punctual in some areas of the city, for instance when certain buildings or activities are under sight of supra-local organizations due to corruption of threat. The exploitation of these structures is tactical for illicit activities: goods could be stored here during their transfer or security cameras switched off when something happens. An attack to these places becomes a political offence.

Conclusions

The cross reading of the different atmospheres and their spatial implications open a reflection above the kind of relationship people have developed with respect to the outer world and the threshold space for excellence: the street. In violent context, people's fear have chronically shaped a negative feeling of the immediate outside but still are *safe* within their community foam. In other cases, the threshold in the movement between bubbles is avoided, especially when wealthier people travel from gated point A to gated point B using private vehicles. This disinterest in the public open space is confirmed by the observation made in Chapter two, when the street design of El Poblado was recognized as not safe for the users as priorities are given to ensure private spheres' security. People need for security and perception of danger in this case are completely different as everything without formal control or defensive tools become unsafe. With these observations, we might be in front of a paradox. Gangs controlled neighbourhood could potentially be safer and more efficient compared to formal ones. Those neighbourhoods where gangs are present and their illicit operations do not directly affect the population (ongoing war, access stations, violent repression), people are and feel safe as they know groups' efficiency always guarantee protection in the street. Security is assured with their diffused presence and so is inhabitants' understanding of justice, still violently unfolding. That is not the case in the centre where the presence of formal security is not properly distributed and just those who can afford it use private vigilance for the preservation of their bubble. As police forces cover just the main buildings or public spaces, people rely on other's people presence where other forms of control are not available but that is not enough to actually guarantee safety. In general, non-State armed groups were able to create an alternative mechanism to engage citizens' trust and are better in providing several services including security.

If this chapter focused on the understanding of the atmosphere for what they are today, the next one will investigate on the different resilience practices that modified the local air conditioning, analysing also how they contributed in the construction of a different relationship with the public open space.



Street vendors between buildings.



Metroline infrastructure, Prado station.



Plaza San Antonio.



Main pedestrian avenue, Carrera 49 Junin.



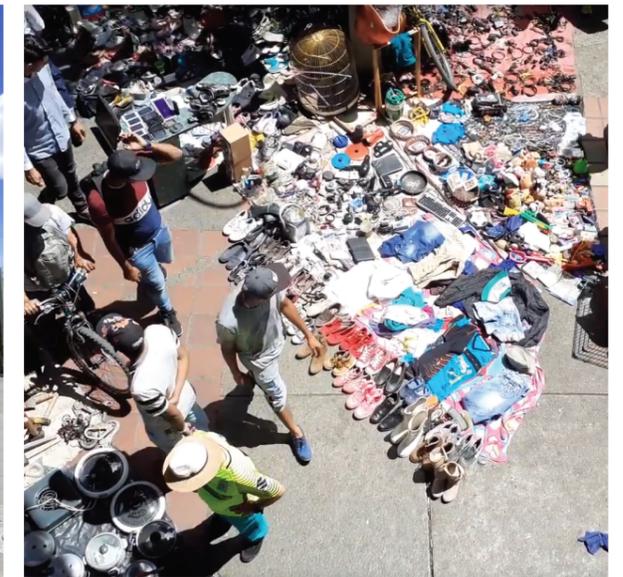
Skyline of the city from Laureles.



Plaza Botero.



Plaza Cisneros.



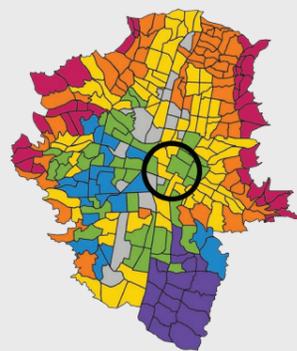
"El Hueco" informal market.

ANNEX 1

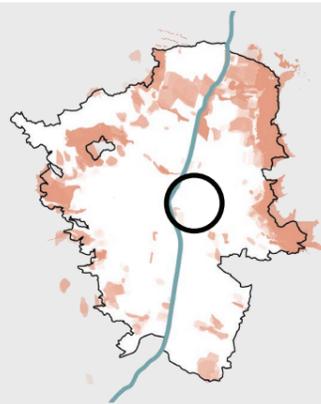
*author's photographs

Centre CONTROL

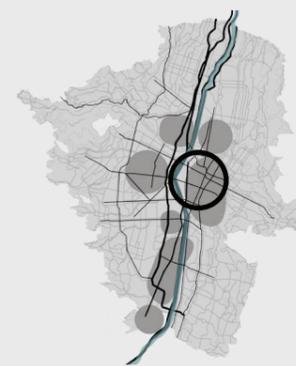
Economic and financial activities attracts people during the day. Bands do not fight here but are responsible for micro-criminality as much as others lonely bandits.



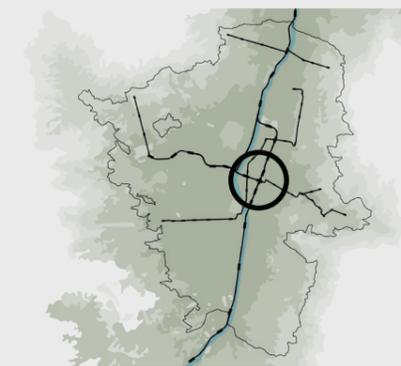
Social stratification: between 3 and 4



1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services & road network



Public transport & terrain altimetry



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



Main distribution road, Avenida El Poblado.



Commercial center El Tesoro.



Buildings' view from street level.



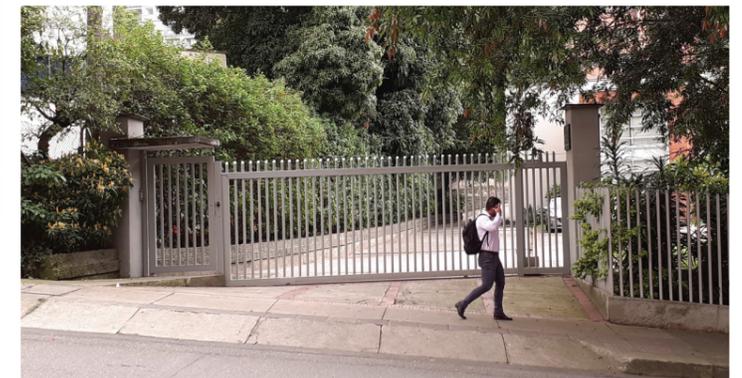
Private benches and open space.



Portion of El Poblado cityscape.



Typical residential street.



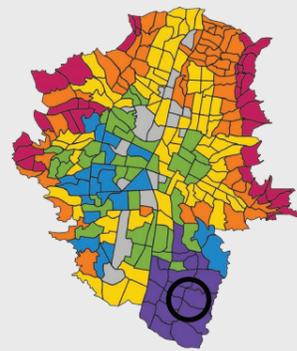
Gates are found at the entrance of each residential complex.

ANNEX 2

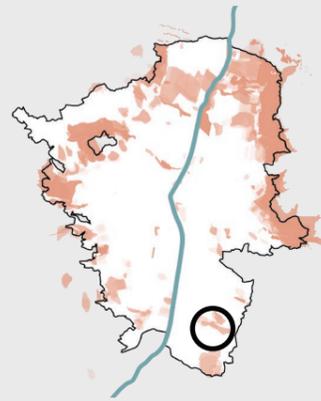
*author's photographs

El Poblado CONTROL

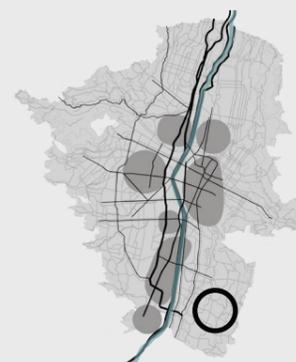
The Comuna is a constellation of gated communities with private services within their boundaries. Homicides are hardly seen here and drug dealing diffused close to the touristy area.



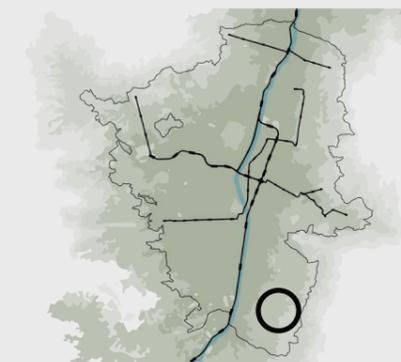
Social stratification: 6



1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services & road network



Public transport & terrain altimetry: 250 m above centre level



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● nsag victims



Typical building.



Neighbourhood park with private security.



Typical residential street.



Main commercial avenue, Carrera 70.



Public open space at one entrance of the sportive district.



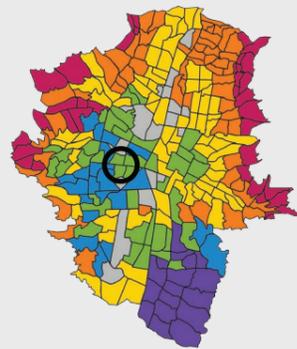
Interior of the Unidad Deportiva Atanasio Girardot.

ANNEX 3

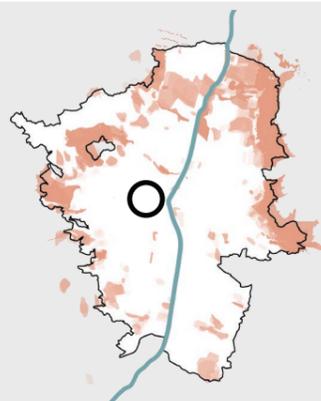
*author's photographs

Laureles CONTROL

The area is known for its sportive and cultural facilities. The diffused wealth of the middle class is reflected in the typology of housing, cars and private security services. Although few civilians' homicides, gangs are linked with drugs and micro-criminality.



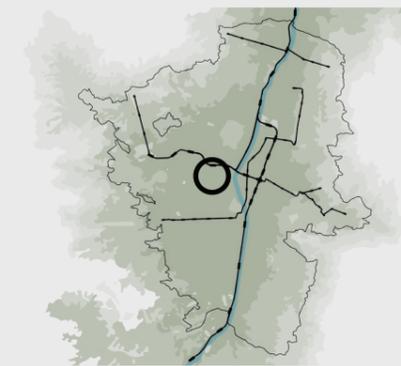
Social stratification: between 4 and 5



1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services & road network



Public transport & terrain altimetry



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



Homeless sleeping in the street.



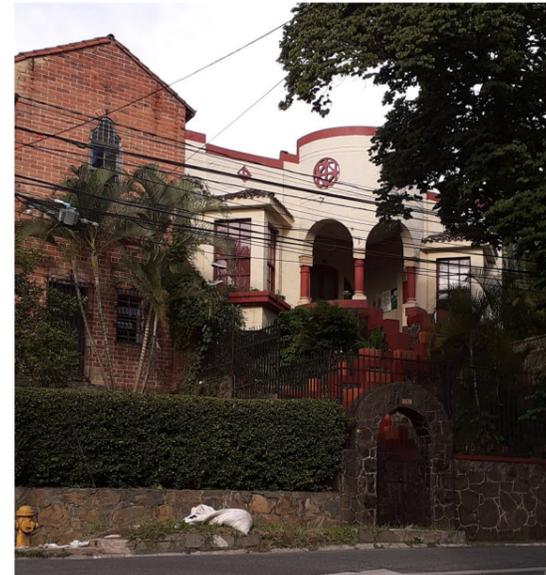
In some street greenery risks to create hidden spots.



Gang members assisting vehicles parking.



In many buildings windows are not present at pavement level leading to lack of eyes control on the street.



The continuous bush on the villa's gate limits visibility.



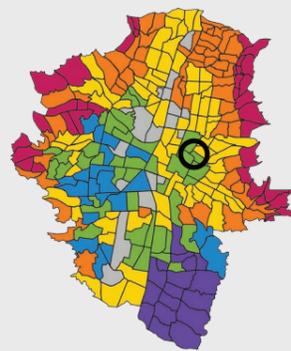
UVA Park La Imaginación.

ANNEX 4

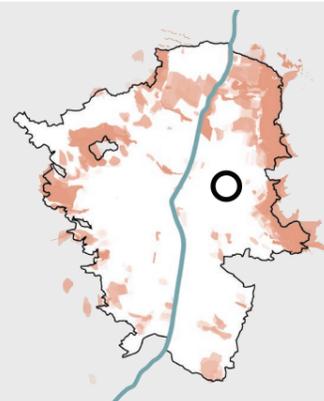
*author's photographs

Prado Centro CONTROL

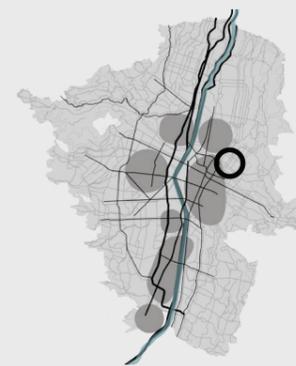
The neighbourhood suffers the present of many drug addicted living in the street. Because of that the area is perceived as unsafe. Gangs control is not discussed and their income comes from the exploitation of the different economic activities.



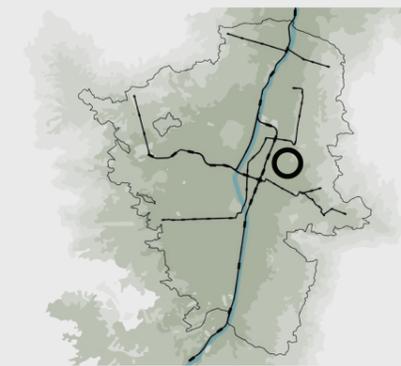
Social stratification: between 3 and 4



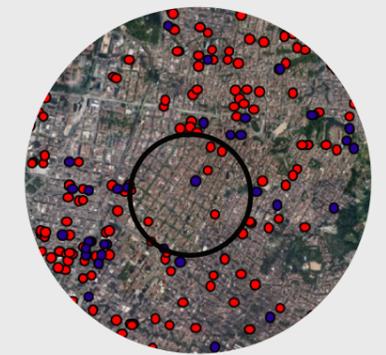
1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services & road network



Public transport & terrain altimetry: 30 m above centre level



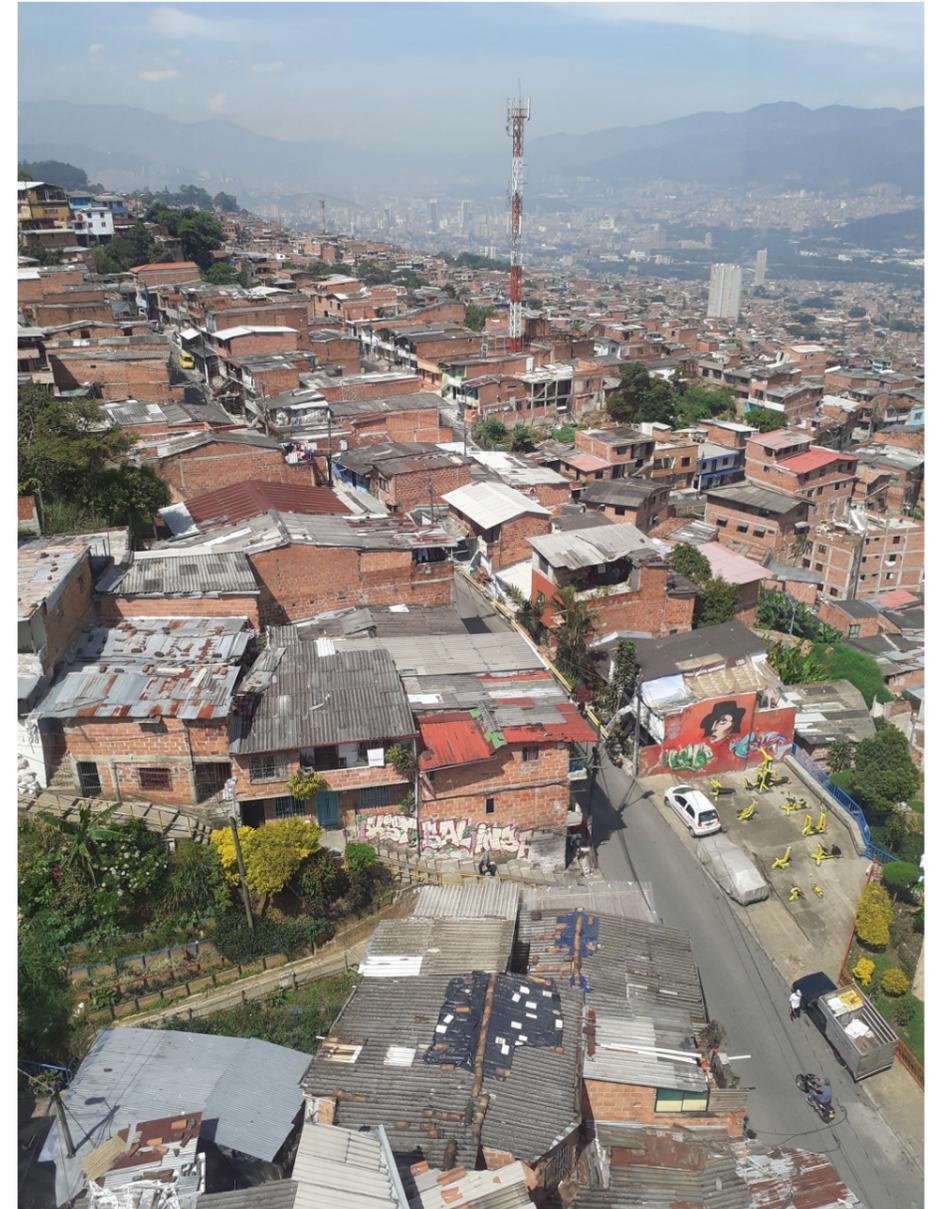
NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



Neighbourhood view from the Metrocable.



Street view from Metrocable.



Neighbourhood view from the Metrocable.



Main residential street with few commercial activities.

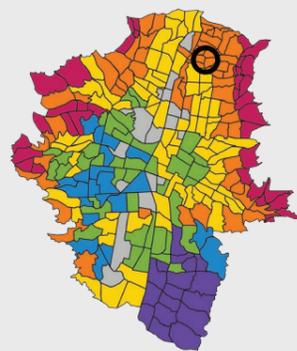


Typical residential street.

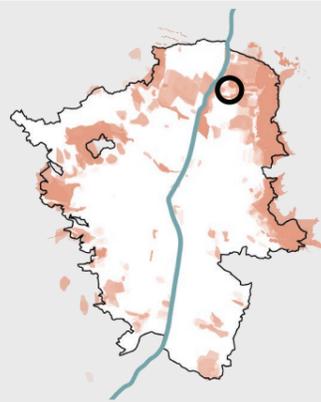
ANNEX 5
*author's photographs

Santa Cruz
DOMINION

After years of strong dominion, gangs violent influence is nowadays reduced but not their aggressive control: curfew still exist today. No strong attraction makes the neighbourhood vibrant.



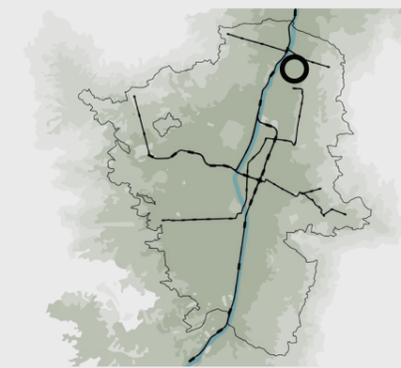
Social stratification: 2



1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services & road network



Public transport & terrain altimetry: 70 m above centre level



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



Neighbourhood view from the Metrocable.



Public open space seen from Metrocable.



Central residential street.



Public open space where the Metrocable pillar are.



Spanish Library under maintenance.



Neighbourhood view from the Metrocable.



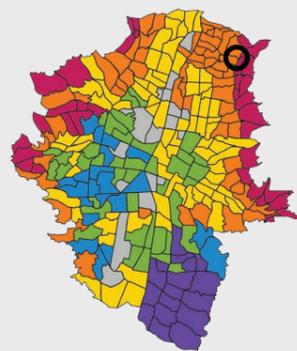
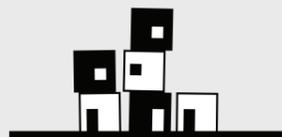
Pedestrian commercial street.

ANNEX 6

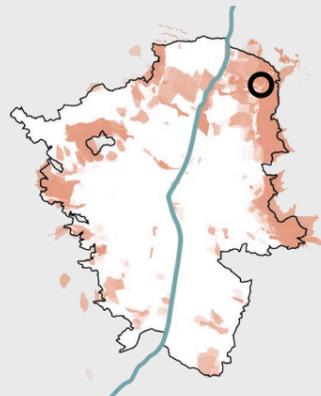
*author's photographs

Santo Domingo DOMINION

Around the physical interventions brought by the Urbanismo Social, people is safely using and walking through the different urban spaces. Civilian homicides are registered at the border with the western barrio.



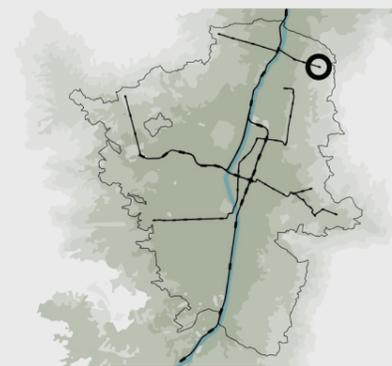
Social stratification: between 1 and 2



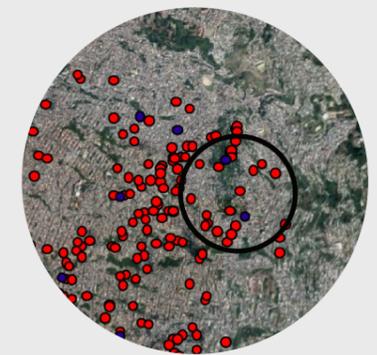
1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services & road network



Public transport & terrain altimetry: 415 m above centre level



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



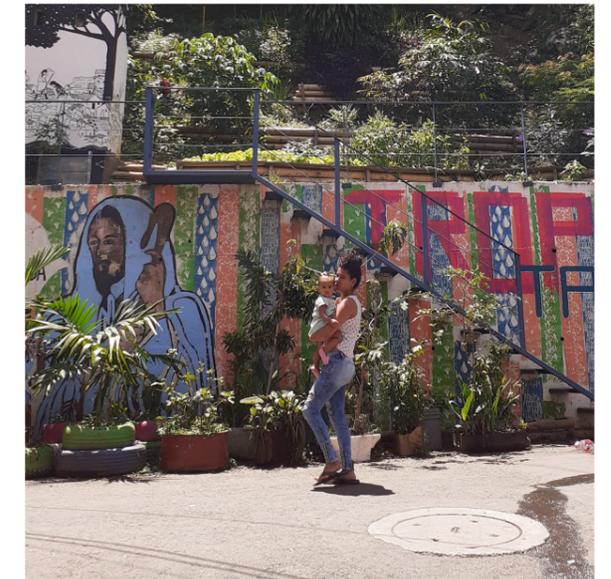
Stairs connecting different levels.



Football fields and commercial activities.



Most of the houses have direct eye's control on the street.



Street art installations.



Moravia's view from the neighbourhood park.



Typical housing conditions.



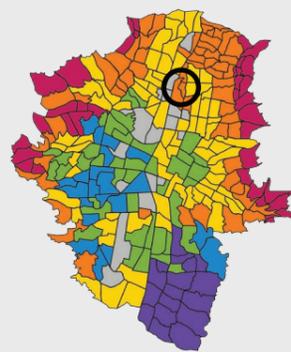
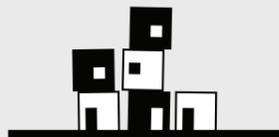
Residential avenue.

ANNEX 7

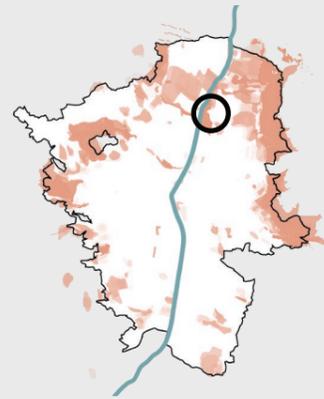
*author's photographs

Moravia DOMINION

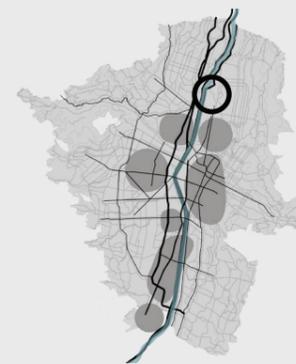
The resistance of the community toward state eviction created a strong bounding capital that reflects in the public life of the neighbourhood. Groups are present and provide different services to citizens.



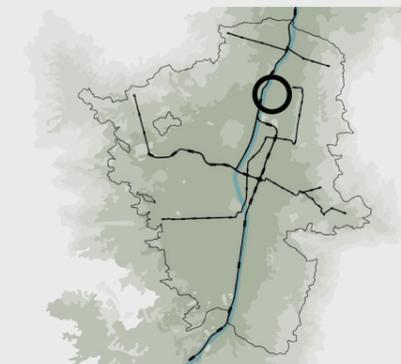
Social stratification: 2



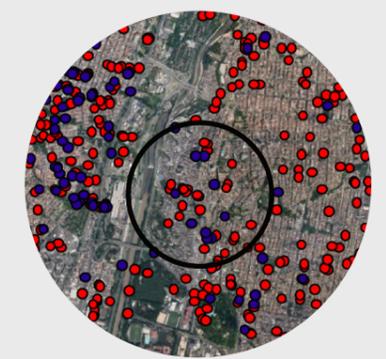
1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services & road network



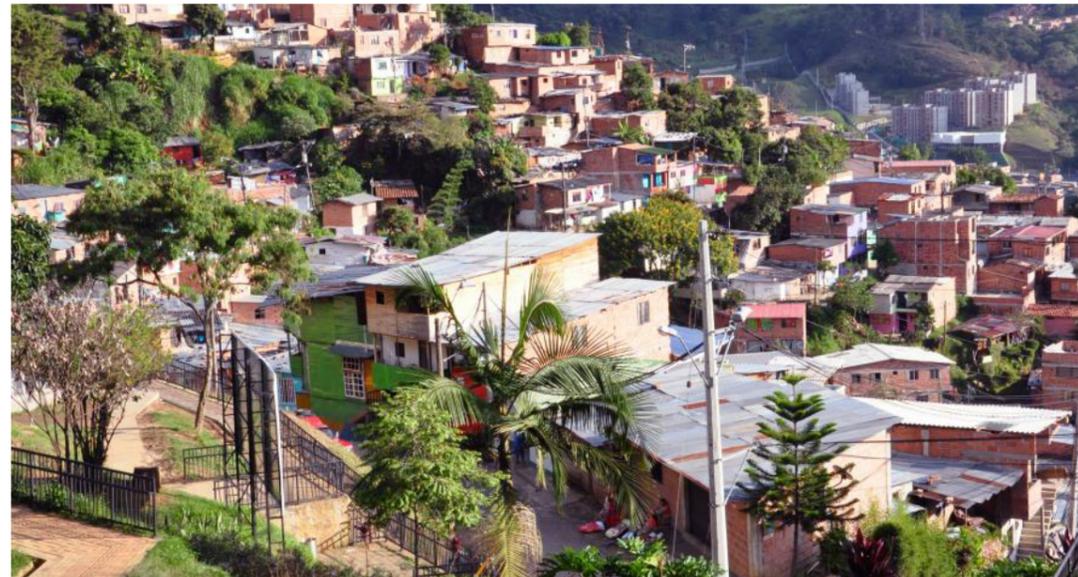
Public transport & terrain altimetry



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



Residential street where the current frontera invisible is located



View of the neighbourhood from the park.



Monument in memory of the 500 inhabitants dead in the landslide of 1987.



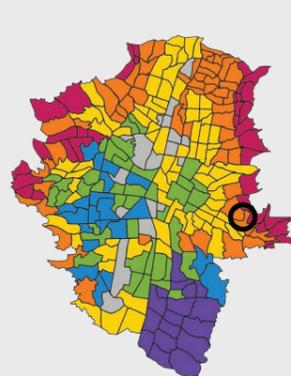
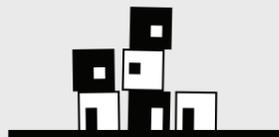
Main commercial street.

ANNEX 8

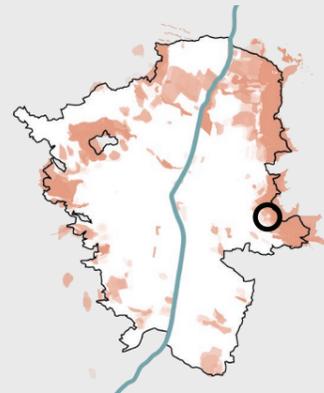
*author's photographs

Villatina
CONFLICT

The cold war kind of atmosphere is perceived in the neighbourhood and people avoid walking in certain areas. Groups presence is accepted by the population as they provided livelihood in the past.



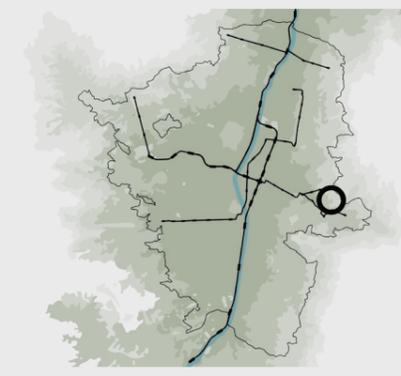
Social stratification:
between 1 and 2



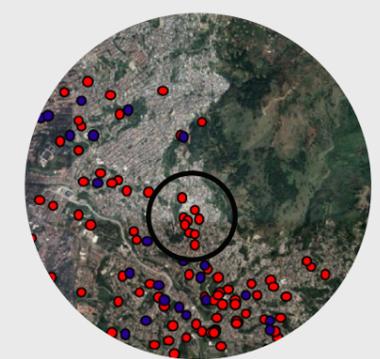
1950 — 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services &
road network



Public transport & terrain
altimetry: 210 m above centre level



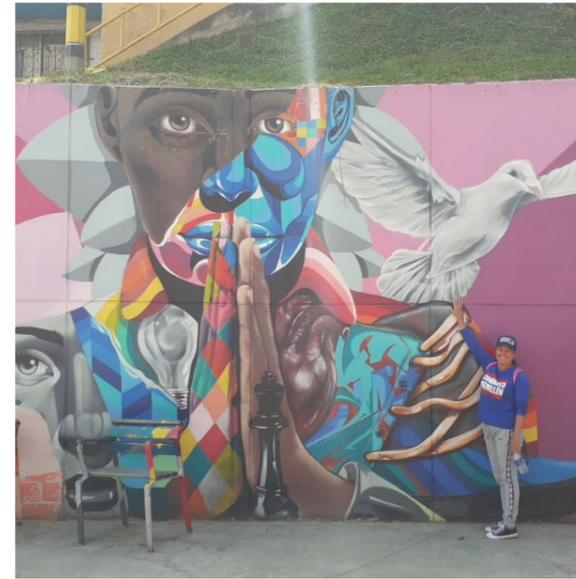
NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



Typical housing conditions.



Street performers entertaining tourist fluxes.



One of the main graffiti.



Street vendors along the tourist path.



Settlement view from the tourist path.



Group of tourists on the electric escalator.

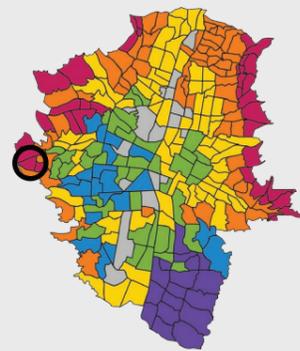


Renewed open space.

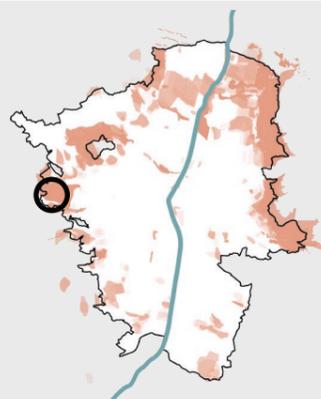
ANNEX 9
*author's photographs

Comuna 13
CONFLICT

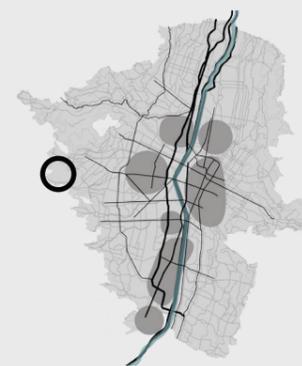
Although the Comuna is famous for its graffiti tour, conflict levels are high between groups with attacks happening mostly in the night. A general mistrust toward the state is diffused after the military operations in the past.



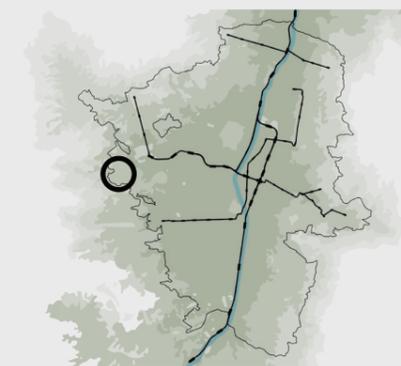
Social stratification:
between 1 and 2



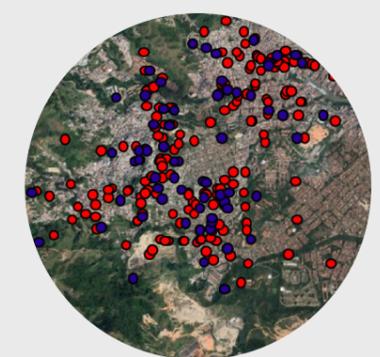
1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services &
road network



Public transport & terrain
altimetry: 220 m above centre level



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims



2008



2012



2015



2019

Settlement evolution. Source: Google Maps



Neighbourhood view from the entrance.



Primary street conditions.



One of the few commercial activity in the primary street.



Typical housing typology.



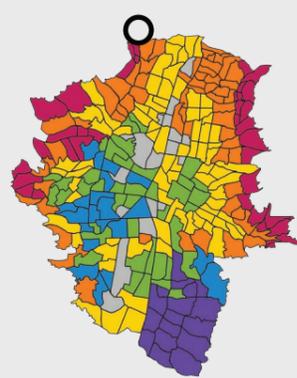
Arranged grey water channel.

ANNEX 10

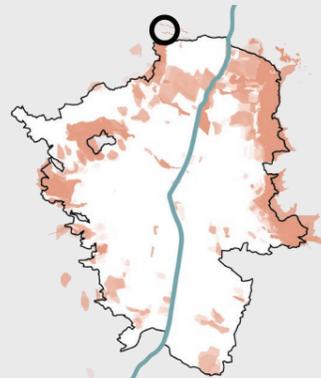
*author's photographs

Nueva Jerusalén
EVICTION

The settlement has grown in around 10 years. State has moved many eviction operations but houses get quickly re-occupied. Gangs provide basic services to people.



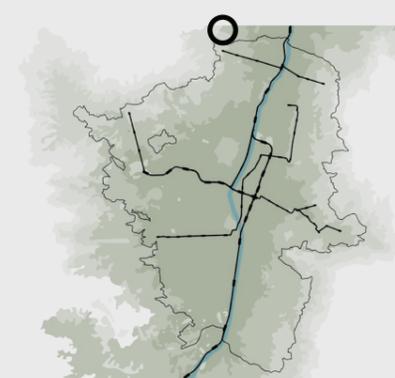
Social stratification:
N/A (probably 1)



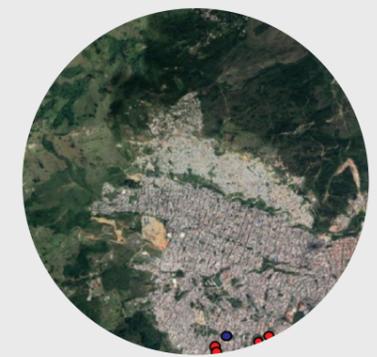
1950 2011
Informal settlements imprint



Main services &
road network



Public transport & terrain
altimetry: 475 m above centre level



NSAG homicides:
● civil victims ● civil victims

Chapter 4 - Vitalist Impulse

In the previous chapter the urban foams were described in their atmospheres according to the current physical, social and political conditions (scheme 1). We know that these States are the results of years of social injustice, violence and communities' *immunization* strategies trying to preserve their existence according to the vitalist impulse at the base of each bubble or foam. This complexity shapes in Medellín in the contrast between marginalized neighbourhoods and city scale *foams*, where the urban political geographies are traced over the conflict between the *by law* spaces and actual spatial legacy. On one side, State by law *owns* everything falling within its urban perimeter and considers other forms of spatial appropriation as threats or something to be eliminated. On the other, communities occupied lands forgotten by a State sometimes not even accepted and that by virtue of its law used violence to repress people. The interpretation of alternative communities as parasitic entities becomes then limiting and unfair because it does not consider the social and physical construction of other *legitimate* communities according to their point of view, this time based on territorial legacy and *spatial justice* and not on *formal national law* (scheme 2). It is important to re-mark that State in some cases was never seen as an institutional and legitimate referee by marginalized inhabitants: "*we came here when there was nothing and here we built our community. Why is the State coming? What does it want from us?*" (Interview 14). The co-existence of contrasting *imagined communities* is then the basic assumption for the reading of the city-foams as the immunization practices, interpreted in terms of resilience to chronic violence, aims to the worlds' preservation according to the worlds' point of view. Starting by defining resilience, the analysis will focus the processes that allowed the whole city to move forward the effects of violence and enabled the construction of a new urban narration.

Resilience from whom and for what

Davis (2012) defines resilience to chronic violence as "*the capacity of individuals or communities to resist against the perpetrators of violence through strategies that help them establish relatively autonomous control over the activities, spaces, and social or economic forces and conditions that comprise their daily lives.*" If State is the perpetrator of violence, bands could be interpreted as the resilient mechanism of their community-foam in order to respond to the effects of an exclusionary and aggressive system. In this case, the symbiosis between armed groups and marginalized civil society prevents state actions to discuss everyone *illicit* activities and informal spaces (abusive occupation of land and construction, informal economy, drug-trafficking, etc.) that assure a different but necessary (State-denied) livelihood. When non-State actors violently exert their control of the neighbourhood, inhabitants see two violent forces and have just themselves as referees. The overall oppressive atmosphere led to the mentioned social death of the community and that damages its cohesion and bounding capacity. In this case resilience becomes a self-immunization process as the *polluting* entity is inside the community-foam and no other actor can help. With non-State groups as perpetrators of violence, resilience, from the State point of view, means preserving the foam-city atmosphere and interventions are conducted within its urban perimeter but not in its legacy spaces according to communities/armed groups point of view. In this war for control, civil society, after years of violence and conflicts, finds itself in the middle of two forces and it becomes hard to choose who to rely on



Private forces presence



Non-state armed groups influence



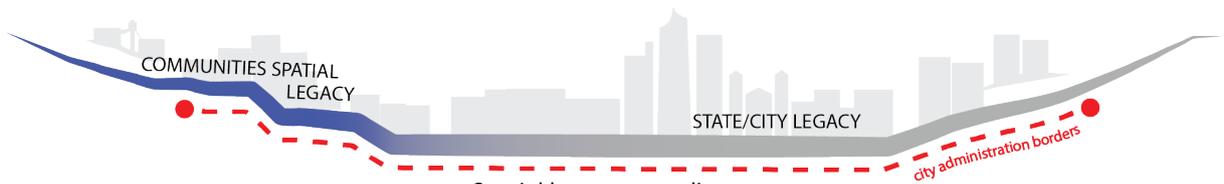
State forces presence



Medellin Cross Section



Buildings conditions: ● informal ● formal



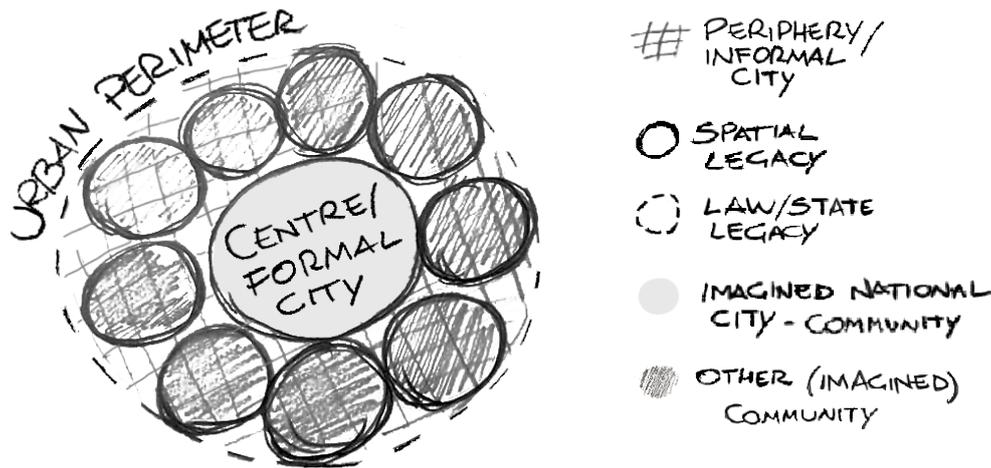
Spatial legacy according to marginalized inhabitants



Social Stratification



Scheme 1: Conceptual cross-section and analysis showing the complexity of the stratas composing Medellín according to the previous Chapter. Author's elaboration.



Scheme 2: Legacy and “community” divisions.
Author’s sketch.

between the two. At the end of the day, both armed groups and State commit human rights violations, homicides and abuses of power.

The goals of resilience also change when considering actors. For the State, at the city scale, resilience aims to reduce the power of non-State actors while taking back the control over the territory. In this way, the distances between formal and informal worlds are also neared. For civil society, resilience means going forward what violence has left, trying to reduce violence itself regardless of the actor using it: resilience to chronic violence for people mean preservation of life in the first place. According to the previous definition, even non-State groups are resilient: their vitalist impulse drives them to evolve and re-organize each time their existence or authority is discussed by others. When fights with formal authority or with other gangs drastically reduce the number of militants and it becomes counter-productive for everyone, pacts become the strategy to ensure *communities’* existence. Still Davis (2012) offers a classification of these degrees of resilience by identifying positive, negative and equilibrium resilience. When positive, “*collective social, political, and economic capacities of urban institutions are invigorated and city-wide violence is tangibly reduced*”. When resilience is negative, violence also is reduced but non-State armed groups are those exerting major social and spatial control. Finally, equilibrium resilience occurs when a fragile truce is established between State and non-State armed groups but “*violence is easily set off*”. These conditions are all found in the city of Medellín but change according to the scale and the *world* taken into consideration. For example, the local consequences of the Urbanismo social re-established a relative form of control of the community over its environment even though pacts between groups had their influence as well in the general reduction of violence.

The reduction of violence needs then to take into account many declinations and meanings of resilience as *communities* all contributed in the modification of the city-foam atmosphere. Considering just what the State has done would be unfair because in some cases civil society moved the first resilient steps that later allowed the State to reconnect with its forgotten territory. The practices identified will then be organized according to these points of view, focusing particularly on space, not just in terms of physical modification but also in the uses that allowed the modification of the atmospheres.

Civil society resilience

It was already said that gangs could be considered civil society's resilience tool towards State when it represents the violent actor. However, the relationship between non-State members and civil society is a contrasting one. As already commented, back in the days the industry of violence was the only one assuring livelihood and people used to see armed groups as social or political referees. Younger generations were growing up in an environment where militants were seen as models and becoming a group member was an achievement in order to reach a certain social status, success and money. Other possibilities of life were hardly considered and, without State presence, actually impossible. As it happens today, it does not surprise that groups used to recruit members since their childhood: at that age, children's mind is still more pliant (Interview 9). If on one side mothers were scared to lose their sons in this world, on the other, when guys were going back home with food and other expensive goods, they were not asked where the money to buy all those things came from (Interview 14). Another consequence, already discussed, was the death of public life. People were limited in their daily activities not only due to gangs control, disputes and curfew. Social and education possibilities were also missing as no physical spaces and institutions promoting them were present. In some cases religious communities were providing them but still struggling between State eviction attempts and other violent actors' control.

This lack of other life expectation and possibilities is the right framework for analysing civil society resilience toward chronic violence. Thanks to the contribution of the interviews, it was possible to identify three main strategies:

- Creation of other communities and social referee;
- Performances, parades and events in the public space;
- Social projects directed towards the perpetrators of violence.

Although in some context the violent industry proliferates and attracts the attention of many, the remaining part of the population might choose not to join that world and seek for alternatives to conduct a different life. That is the case of neighbourhood Santa Cruz and the *Corporación Cultural Nuestra Gente*. The neighbourhood used to be divided between militias and the cartel of Medellín and men life expectancies were limited to choose which of the two agencies enrol to. The area was also famous for the diffuse presence of brothels and that represented the income for many women that could hardly achieve other jobs with basic education. Without the State, institutional school programmes were absent and learning opportunities limited to courses and spaces arranged by the community itself. In this scenario social stigmatization labelled men as criminals and women as prostitutes, increasing the distances with the local administration and with the formal civil society. In 1987 a group of 36 young people, tired violence constantly present in their life, with the support of the religious community organized a space where to perform arts, especially theatre. Their work started involving children, first in the form of after-school activity and later with structured courses where also values could be taught. A child joining these recreational gatherings was a potential resource taken out from the underworld. Soon the Corporation attracted different age groups' attention and the place became a landmark for the community. With this potential achieved, their actions overflowed in the street. On a temporal



Pictures sequence 1: Corporación Cultural Nuestra Gente street parade of 2008.
Source: Corporación Cultural Nuestra Gente Flickr account.

basis and connected with similar realities, street parades and performances became the turning point of the corporation mission. People were celebrating in the street, the same space that meant violence, death and oppression. People had finally the possibility to *“take back the public space, to understand other ways to look at the territory because if everyone closes himself in its house, it is normal that someone else takes the dominion of the street”* (Interview 14). Those parades were also crossing some of the *fronteras invisibles*, helping to mentally break those rigid spatial divisions imposed by violent members.

A similar experience but with a different background comes from *Casa Kolacho*, a Hip-Hop school in the Comuna 13 founded in 2011. At the beginning of the 2000 and with the diffusion of the hip-hop culture, local artists gathered in the *Red de Hip Hoppers Elite*, promoting cultural initiatives as alternatives to violence. In 2004 their synergies collected in the *Revolución sin Muertos* (Revolution

without deaths), a festival *“not against war, arms and death but in favour of life”* promoting *“art, peace and non-violence”* (extract from the interview made by Londoño, 2011). Just from their fourth edition, the municipality started supporting the festival that today is considered the second biggest Hip-Hop event in the whole country. In 2008 the success of the network led to the organization of music courses, the same year that the conflict between non-State armed actors reopened (Don Berna was extradited that year). The deliberate violence causes the death of many civilians including these artists that during those years became new social referees for many young people as their message and activities were attracting the attention of the whole city to the neighbourhood. Although these artistic leaders were killed, the heritage of their efforts were collected by their students that funded Casa Kolacho. As the Corporación Nueva Gente, their mission is not fighting bands but offering alternatives and restoring values by promoting culture without discussing armed groups activities. The school today runs dance and music courses, concerts, exhibitions and street art that assure the self-sustenance of the organization, sometimes with some contribution of the municipality or other organizations. Among all, the major impact of the school is the *“Graffiti Tour”* that completely changed the perception of the neighbourhood at urban and national scale: the tour has become a must-see attraction when visiting Medellín. Today everyone knows Comuna 13 for its iconic graffiti and there is a whole business built along the tourist path that means income for many local inhabitants. The members of Casa Kolacho are not just the authors of most of the works of art but also they started the very first unofficial visit in 2010.

Although many similarities between the two cases, their relationship with armed actors were completely different. In the first case, when asking about it, the interviewed reply that non-State armed groups never perceived their activities as threats. At the beginning groups' members sometimes entered the theatre or saw what performers were doing in the street from a corner, leaving after a while. An important detail also characterize this case. Combatants and members of the corporation were part of the same generation and knew each other since their childhood: gangs were familiar with them and knew their real intentions. The relationship in the second case was not pacific at the beginning. The homicides of many artists in a short temporal distance one from the other was clearly a proof that their message and the overall attention they were driving in the neighbourhood was disturbing someone: *“we realized they were killing us”* (Interview 13). A clear warning was received when a list of rappers that had to leave the neighbourhood was delivered. Although a conflictive past, the current situation is different. Today bands know what the interests of casa Kolacho are and a mutual respect between the worlds is maintained: *“If a child enters in Casa Kolacho, ‘pelados’ do not try to recruit them. If a child enters a group, he is in their world and we cannot do anything about it.”*

While talking about gang members, from both the interview another fact was clear: they are all considered victims of a system that did not let them many life choices. The vision of the perpetrator of violence for the community point of view is not as de-humanized as it could be from State point of view, labelling non-State armed groups as terrorists to be eliminated. Casa Kolacho's mission of working with the whole community also included them, especially with the project *Demos en la Raja*. Gang members were asked about dreams and passions of their childhood and when most of them replied they would have liked to be rap artists, an album was recorded using their rhymes. When the tracks were ready and were given back to them, members were wondering why in other songs' words,



Pictures sequence 2. From top-left: Graffiti tour, Revouciòn Sin Muertos Festival, concert in Casa Kolacho, street performances, graffiti session, flyer for workshops, children rap concert.
 Source: Casa Kolacho Facebook page.

many thoughts and emotions were so similar to what they expressed. Once explained that certain tracks belonged to rival gangs', they recognized the similarities between them and mentally neared the distances built within the violent context.

Corporaciòn Cultural Nuestra Gente and Casa Kolacho are just two examples of similar communitarian activities taking place in the whole city, other times having sport as focal activity. As shown, the related public events of these organizations became awaited festivals, and are still happening despite violence level reduced or where *fronteras invisibles* no longer exist. Most of them started independently and just when got the attention of the municipality, more structured programmes were possible. As it will be discussed later, this communitarian organizations where the channels public administration used to strategically reconnect with its forgotten spaces. However, the bounds with the municipality are still delicate and often organizations seek alternative institutions for economic sources (donors, privates).

State resilience

In the historical analysis of the city, it was shown that for many years planning had always been interested in the development of central and remunerative areas, forgetting the social and physical issues of the peripheral barrios. As seen, the initial strategy to line the situation was providing basic services by redrafting the urban borders and that allowed people to access basic services such as water, roads and electricity; social, economic and political gaps were still not solved. Moreover, the war against illegality was still strong and in the contrasts with armed groups, many civilians were negatively affected by the situation. From the 90s, thanks to the decentralization of the Colombian government, the city had major power and responsibility for tackling urban issues and since then, different actions aimed to recover those structural inequalities. Even though the Urbanismo Social is identified as the turning point of the city resilience, the whole process was not possible without the contributions of civil society initiatives and previous urban interventions that neared the distances between communities and municipality in the first place.

In the identified strategies, the line between poverty reduction and violent culture blurs as the two issues were somehow linked. Many people entered the underworld because State exclusion did not let them any other choice and informal spaces became the general the incubators of criminals and diffused illegality. State resilience was and still is possible because of:

- Physical and infrastructural interventions;
- Urban social policies;
- Micro-credit formulas;
- Institutional design;
- Disarmament and reintegration programmes;

For the analysis of these actions, the Urbanismo Social will be identified as temporal reference in order to understand the previous interventions that were able to test different approaches in tackling violence and placed the bases for a new co-existence culture.

Before Urbanismo Social

With the rising informality at national scale, different funds and laws were introduced in order to provide social housing and to promote more tolerant approaches towards people self-construction. The strategy of simply legalizing land tenure did not solve many other problems, such as economic and social improvement. In 1989 the national Urban Land Reform made local government responsible for addressing informality through the creation of mandatory local development plans and from here, the PRI-MED or *Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales en Medellín* (Integrated Slum Upgrading Program of Medellín) was conceived as the first attempt to enter, map, study and improve the marginal parts of the city. Moreover, a special attention was paid in the alleviation of social decomposition and urban safety as rising criminality and inequalities could not be ignored any longer.

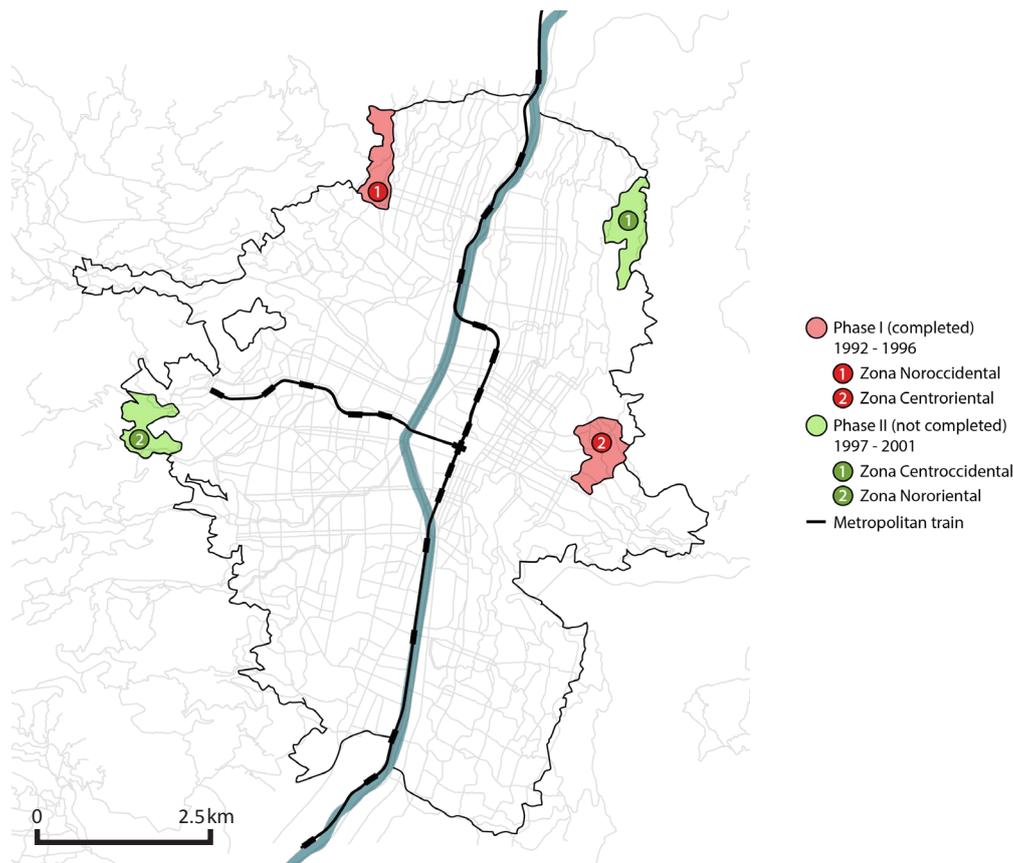
The goals of the programme were distributed in six action lines:

- Establishment of adequate planning and management mechanism that allows the continuity of the programme of urban improvement;
- Promotion and communitarian participation for the solution of neighbourhood problems;
- Improvement of basic infrastructures, public services, communitarian equipment and public space;
- Housing improvement and relocation when areas are not recoverable;
- Legalization of the land tenure;
- Mitigation of geological risk.

PRI-MED was conceived as a *collective pact* “building a safe city, peaceful and respectful of the collective co-existence” that allowed to “built a modern city [...] with the highest quality of life index in the whole country” (PRIMED 1996). In order to sustain this collective project, the community had to be placed at the centre of the process and its participation fundamental for the development of successful and needed actions. Besides the municipality and the national government, other external institutions were involved in the programme such as the UNDP (United Nation Development Programme) and the German Government, providing both experts and funds. Other strategic actors were the NGOs and the communitarian organizations existing in the barrios. Their knowledge, people’s trust and social networks were the key element to secure citizen participation.

At the beginning people was doubtful about the real interests of the municipality and sometimes the community leaders involved were even accused of betrayal. Technicians were working in on-purpose built Oficinas Zonal (zone offices) and citizens, mostly women, were slowly getting interested in what was being done. Ownership and land legalization were the turning point of the project as inhabitants recognized the potential of PRIMED and became more willing to invest their economic resources and time for the community development: sometimes temporary jobs or skill training formulas were also viable. People started contributing actively with trustful information about the numbers of people for place, the situation of single mothers, incomes, etc. In a second moment, a structured committee were established and guided through the planning and construction phase with NGOs support. This institutional and decentralized formula, not only allowed municipal presence in the area, but also created the conditions for a shared visioning and public engagement (PRIMED 1996).

The programme was divided in two phases, 1992-1996 and 1997-2001 (map 1) and benefits reached 15 neighbourhoods, 9000 houses and 11 thousands families. Important infrastructural works improved the general accessibility through new open spaces sometimes equipped with sport facilities. The self-built communitarian buildings with educational or health purposes were also renewed and, when available, supported with funding directed toward youth. The mass level of need made these other interventions largely symbolic: people still did not have access to a professional education or to a proper health system. Phase two of the programme had fewer impacts compared with the first as the political change in the city government drove the resources’ allocation, also because of the debts collected for the construction of the metro line. In general the overall project was a success and living



Map 1. PRIMED interventions. Personal Elaboration. Data source: Urbam EAFIT 2013 & PRIMED 1995

conditions significantly improved even though the degree of isolation and the reduced scale of the intervention did not permit a real integration within the whole urban structure (Bentacur 2007).

PRIMED was important for two aspects: the first, the construction of a relationship between some marginalized communities and State: the programme represented the first concrete action the municipality adopted in order to near distances between the two. This slow reconciliation was the first trial to legitimate State presence after years of absence and conflicts. Before that, the municipality did not even have idea of the number of inhabitants, typology of housing, sizes, density, constructive systems, and quality of materials nor knew about the existence of urban services. The second aspect was the creation of professional figures developing skills, approaches and methodologies to be used in marginalized context: the Urbanismo Social will inherit these practices (Urbam EAFIT 2013).

For violence and conflict resolution, PRI-MED was able to achieve some improvement even if that was not its goal. Armed groups exerted pressures on the community and a clientelist attitude was noted by the technicians. On one side people were afraid to lose State investments while on the other felt threatened from groups' reprisals. In barrio el Picacho, the Oficina Zonal together with the *Municipal Peace and Coexistence Adviser* were able to contact armed groups and establish dialogues to find a possible peaceful resolution. Seven criminal bands and a total of 350 young people gave up the arms and that disabled the local conflict between bands, militias and State forces, opening up possibilities of coexistence and citizen harmony (PRIMED 1996).

The synergies created between civil society and municipality were an important achievement for the city development: people participation was important for the drafting of the Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT) of 1999 but especially for the *Development Plan of Medellín 2001-2003* and its circulation policies. Inhabitants of peripheral areas were limited in their movement due to the difficult topographical conditions and the lack of adequate transport infrastructures. Apart from expensive and slow buses, the other choices were walking or eventually using cabs. Additionally, groups' control was still strong and so was extortion; drivers could refuse to enter some neighbourhoods. For the general accessibility and circulation, the plan foresaw:

"Implementing a new model of mobility, with a wide transport offer supported by the Metro and a complementary system assuring the decrease of traveling times, comfort and service efficiency, harmonious with public space and environmental friendly." (Consejo de Medellín 2003)

In 2003 with Mayor Luiz Perez Gutierrez, the feasibility of the funicular system was made and the construction of the first *Metrocable* started in the same year, connecting the Metro station Acevedo with neighbourhood Santo Domingo. This massive intervention was a great occasion for the municipality to bring even more positive and infrastructural change all along the transport path and, when Sergio Fajardo was elected mayor of Medellín, a structured plan of interventions was made. His administration signs the start of the Urbanismo Social.

Urbanismo Social

The Urbanismo Social is a political moment of Medellín history aiming to address simultaneously physical transformation, social intervention, institutional management and citizens' engagement. The programme started with the administration of Sergio Fajardo in 2004 and its policies continued in the following governments of mayors Alonso Salazar and Anibal Gaviria. The political change started with the recognition of a *"society deeply unequal and rooted in violence"* (Sergio Fajardo, from *Del Miedo a la Esperanza*, 2014) that accumulated a social debt with the forgotten city considered more poor, violent and unsafe because of years of State absence. Building an inclusive and equitable city required people to have real access to services, education and to a worthy livelihood: the Urbanismo Social became the tool for an integral human development.

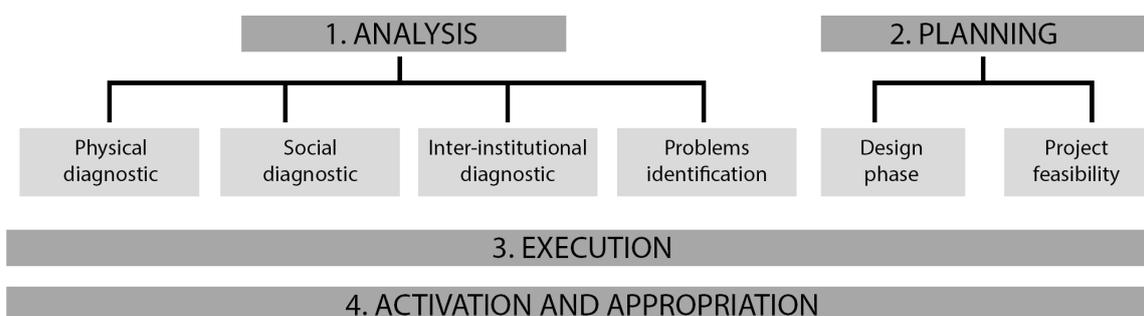
The key elements of the Urbanismo Social were:

- Focus on neighbourhoods with high tensions and low quality of life;
- Urban intervention through strong infrastructural changes, provision of public space and housing;
- Architecture as a dignifying element of social transformation;
- Inter-institutional management and creation of horizontal relationships among the actors;
- Citizen participation;

- Reduction of the distance between State and community;
- Improvement of human capital with a particular focus on education;
- Reduction of violence.

One of the first innovation of the Urbanismo Social was the introduction of local development plans called *Proyecto Urbano Integrale* (Integral Urban Project), collecting and organizing urban interventions taking into consideration the multidimensionality of the expected outcomes. The first plan was the *Nororiental* in Comuna 1 & 2, the same areas where the Metrocable was being built. PUI Moravia and PUI Centroccidental were issued by the same administration while PUI Noroccidental, PUI Centroriental and PUI Comuna 13 produced between 2008 and 2011 even though the areas already identified in the POT revision of 2006 (map 2). In order to assure continuity and independence to the programme, Fajardo’s administration created a special unit within the *Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano* or EDU (Urban Development Corporation) that took responsibility for the whole planning under the guidance of Alejandro Echeverri. The corruption and the inertia of local governance would have risked compromising the programme’s success. Moreover, feelings toward the municipality were still weak and using a side public agency already promoting projects with social impact (mostly parks and recreational spaces in unsupplied areas) would have facilitated the entire operation (Malandrino 2017).

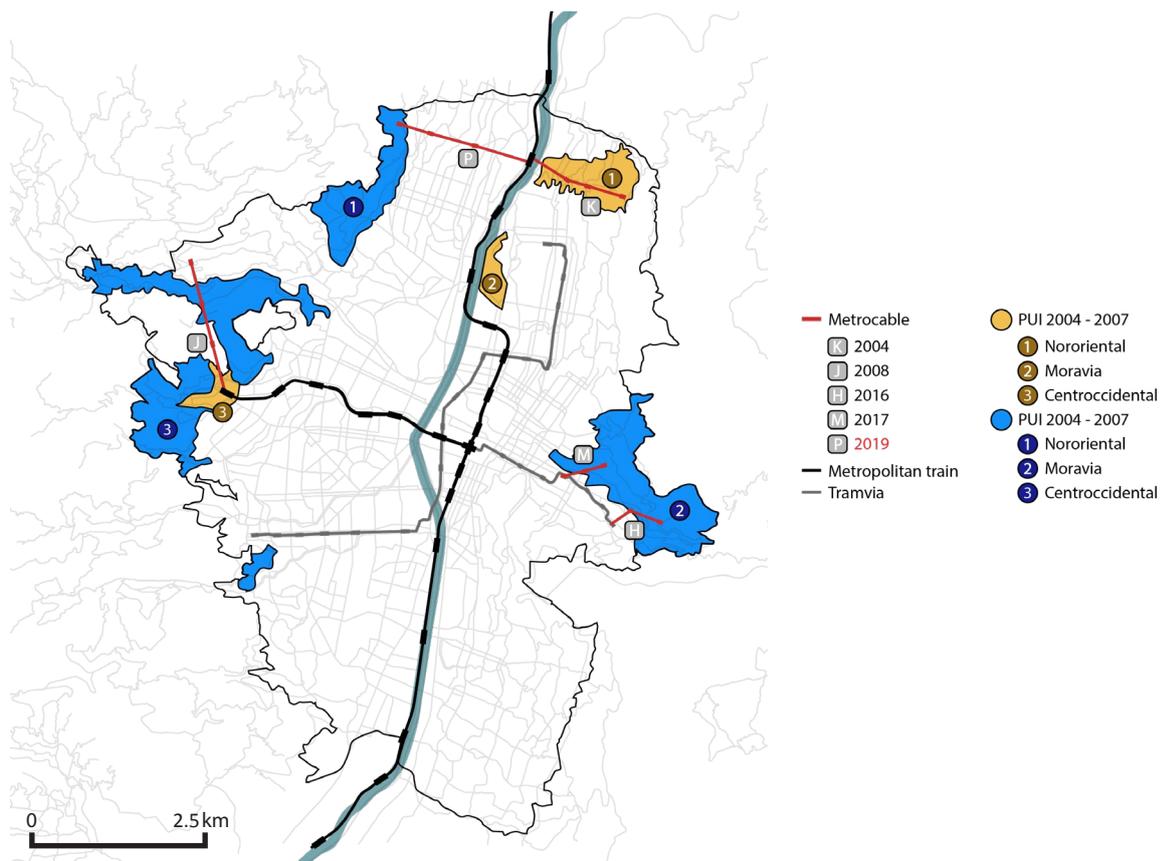
The first PUI worked as a pilot project of this new approach and its successful methodology used for the other plans. Since the diagnostic phase (1, scheme 1), technicians were analysing the selected districts according to three components: physical, social and inter-institutional. For the first component, the territorial analysis aimed to map and classify geographical features, geological risk and soil typologies understanding their relationship with the physical built environment in terms of morphology, typology



Scheme 1. Steps of the PUIs methodology. Source: Urbam EAFIT 2013.

of street and housing. The social diagnostic inspected over the families’ income, education level, health and homicides rates. The third component focused on picturing State programmes, policies and local actors already present in the territory but also those that had potential interest (urbam EAFIT 2013).

In the planning phase (2), the physical proposals concentrated on interventions with high impacts on public space, collective services, housing, mobility and environmental risk mitigation, considering the existence of physical and social limits. Families were reallocated just when geological risk was high or where larger interventions could not avoid removing houses. The social component drove those interventions to focus on real needs of the communities: education, income and health.



Map 2. PUI interventions and transport facilities. Personal Elaboration. Data source: Urbam EAFIT 2013

Even though promoted since the previous phase, a special attention was paid to the participation of the community and its engagement in the whole process: periodic workshops were organized in order to design with people and enable them to establish priorities for the overall development. As in PRIMED, communitarian organizations and NGOs were the channels used to reach people's attention, laying the foundation for the horizontal relationship with the public administration. In the first neighbourhood workshops, some delegates were selected and included in the Local Action Board (different from the JAC) after receiving specialized training. The presence of these members in a formal structure, established a durable connection between the municipality and the community. This overall decentralization was the base for the inter-institutional component and permitted the shared commitment of all the actors included in the project. On an institutional level, a coordination among all the department of the public administration was finally possible with the management of EDU in the whole process. The development of this new design approach sponsored a tight collaboration between politicians, professionals and citizens promoting a multi-disciplinary integration for physical and social improvements. The attention paid to this component succeeded in establishing a citizen culture and civic responsibility among all the parts involved.

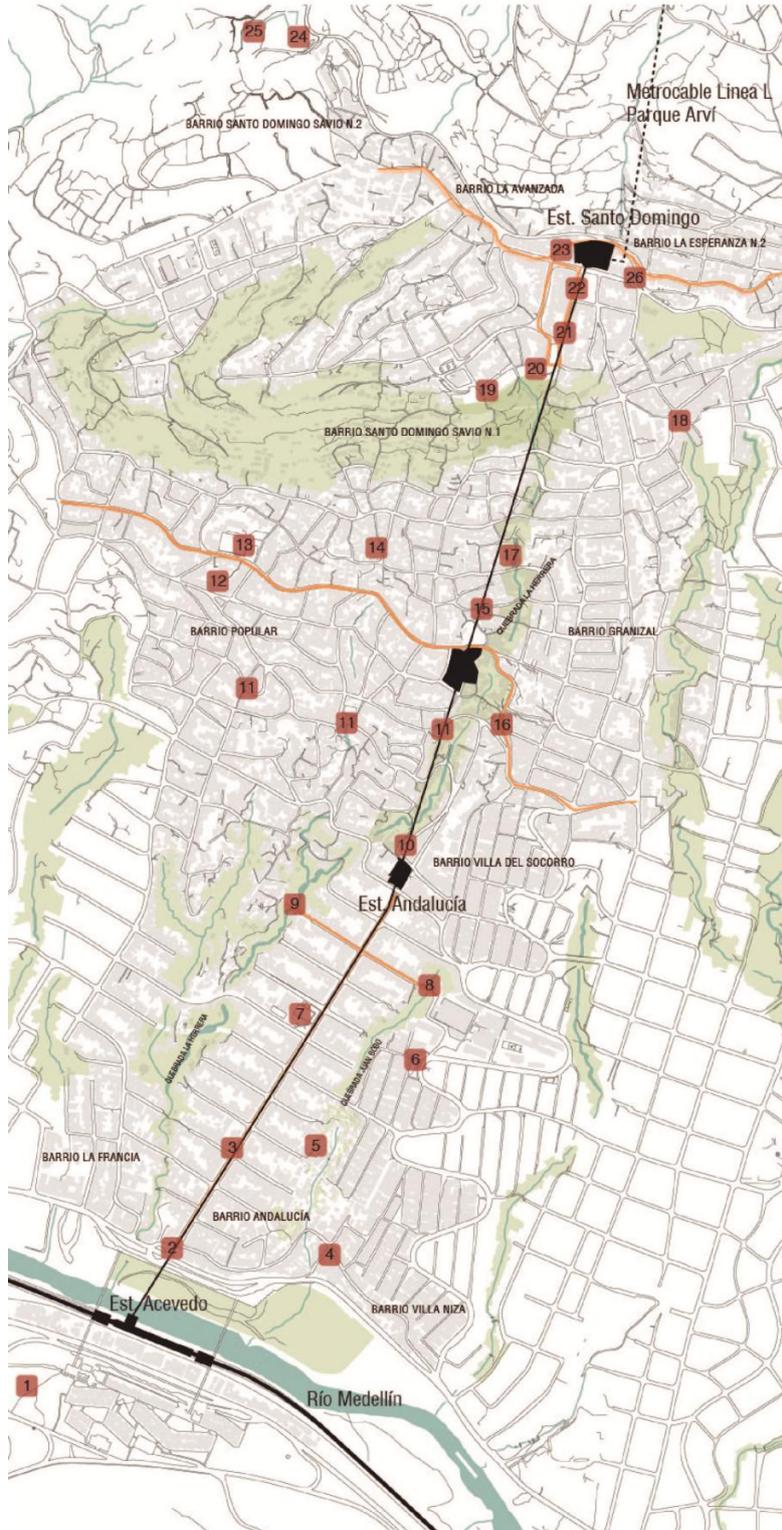
Execution phase (3) was conceived in order to bring positive changes in the life of local inhabitants. Many of the workers were in fact local unemployed unskilled labours that after proper training were hired by the building contractors. This initiative allowed mostly young people to develop capacities to spend later in the job market. Trainings were also occasions to slowly reinsert those group members

URBANISMO SOCIAL EN MEDELLÍN

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PROYECTO URBANO INTEGRAL NORORIENTAL (PUI)



Localización



Convenciones

- Río Medellín
- Metro línea A
- Metro cable línea L
- Metro cable línea K

- Colegio Presbítero Antonio José Bernal 1
- Parque de acceso paseo 107 2
- Paseo Andalucía 3
- Parque primaveral 4
- Nueva vivienda quebrada Juan Bobo 5
- Parque de la Imaginación 6
- Parque de las Victorias 7
- Puente de la Paz 8
- Puente 48A - El mirador 9
- Parque de la paz y la cultura 10
- Galería urbana pintando la esperanza 11
- Parque los Lavaderos 12
- Parque Paulo VI 13
- Parque Los Pozos 14
- Parque Balcón del Ajedrez 15
- Mercado barrial 16
- Parque lineal La Herrera 17
- Unidad deportiva Granizal 18
- Parque biblioteca Santo Domingo Savio 19
- Parque mirador 20
- Paseo urbano calle 106/Parque de los niños 21
- CEDEZO Santo Domingo 22
- Paseo Puerto Rico 23
- Colegio Antonio Derka 24
- Jardín infantil Santo Domingo 25
- Casa de gobierno 26

Pictures sequence 3. "Talleres de imaginarios" with different focus groups.
Source: Rodríguez 2009 & EDU website.

that joined the disarmament and reintegration process. Since the AUC truce of 2005, other peace processes were promoted on local scale and Fajardo's government specifically instituted the Programa Paz y Reconciliación (Peace and Reconciliation programme), which purpose was to organize workshops to develop skills as mechanic, construction worker, cook or salesmen (Rozema 2008).

The final phase (4) meant more than just delivering new sources to the community. People had to feel they owned those spaces in order to guarantee their durability and proper use. Each time a new space was open, a special event in form of festival, cultural or artistic exhibition, film projection or sportive competition were organized and sponsored through different communication channels (radios, television advertising, posters) to reach out the whole city. Local community groups, especially those dealing with arts and youth, were called to perform during the ceremonies. In each inauguration



Pictures sequence 3. *Talleres de imaginarios* with different focus groups.
Source: Rodríguez 2009 & EDU website.

symbolic *Pactos ciudadanos* (Citizens agreements) were established between the administration and the community, aiming to witness the shared commitment to take care of the new facilities. The “Festival de Mingo” was one of these initiatives and is today a monthly street market gathering small family businesses and local entrepreneurs of the North-West districts (Calderon 2012).



Pictures sequence 4. Inauguration of *Parque de la Paz*, barrio Popular.
Source: Rodríguez 2009.

The benefits of the first PUI and its integration with the MetroCable system brought immediate improvements in the neighbourhoods. People were enabled to move through the city with efficient public transport at a moderate fee and in shorter times. If a ride from Santo Domingo core to the centre could take up to two hours paying multiple fares, today the total journey (Metrocable plus Metropolitan train), takes just 30 minutes with one ticket. The physical infrastructure itself brought other positive advancement in the proximity of the stations and where structural piles were installed. Usually, the surrounding unbuildable space at their base became the occasion to provide quality public space (fig. 1) installing facilities demanded by people such as open air gym facilities (fig. 3 & 4). Stations where instead integrating squares at their bases (fig. 2) and their design improved the environment

through the different levels of the sloping terrain. The new flows of people around the stations allowed economic activities to open almost immediately in the surrounding of the infrastructure: because of the precarious architecture of informal structures, inhabitants easily demolished the street-facing wall of their houses and furnished those rooms with basic facilities to sell food or other goods. To support these investments, the *Banco de los Pobres* (Banks for the Poor), later called *Banco de las Oportunidades* (Bank of the Opportunity) was created in order to support those small business by offering special loans formulas. Citizen groups between five and ten people could apply for funds up to 350 US dollars committing to pay back in three months. This initiative had an impact in reducing armed groups control on people life: groups in fact used to provide loans to poor families but their interests were too expensive (around 20% each month) and the consequences of not paying back had generally violent turn (Alsema 2017).

All these spatial interventions also worked in the mitigation of violence, especially in alleviating people's fear of using urban space. The new transport infrastructure in the first place, opened other access points throughout Comuna 1 and 2, and that affected armed groups' control on people's flows. Additionally, with police forces constantly present in the stations, inhabitants had less fear entering or leaving the neighbourhood as no one would have limited them. Almost all the new public buildings actually represented the chance to introduce formal control in the barrios and positive effects were registered in the open space surrounding them; people was finally able to move and live the public space without being frightened, at least during certain hours. The totality of these physical interventions changed the perception of groups' sovereignty over the urban territory, and they partially lost their aggressive spatial control and social dominion. Other times, interventions increased the levels of conflict, especially during their construction; that is what happens when building the famous escalator in Comuna 13. Strong physical modification of the urban layout, and particularly its accessibility between different levels, had its consequences in creating a new urban battlefield. As reported by Samper (2018), the workers involved in the construction of the escalator, had to hide during the shootout between warring gangs. However, construction itself represented a source of income for groups: one of the contractor stated its company had to pay gangs for security.

An important element of the Urbanismo Social was its focus on education and the importance given to its spaces:

"In Medellín we have to build the most beautiful buildings in the places where State presence has been minimum. The first step should be the quality of the education and the dignity of its space. When the poorest child of Medellín can access the best classrooms in the city, we are sending a powerful message of social inclusion" (Sergio Fajardo personal website).

The Spanish Library (fig. 10 & 11), a fundamental component of PUI Nororiental, became the symbol of this political transition. The structure was designed by architect Giancarlo Mazzanti and inaugurated in 2007 with the visit of the Spanish King. It includes many cultural and recreational spaces among which a library, an auditorium, a children playroom, computer labs and spaces for workshops, etc. that gave people opportunities to develop new skills and ambitions for their life. The construction on that location was also an occasion to secure an important portion of the territory in landslide danger: the present precarious houses were demolished and inhabitants reallocated. Some structural problems



Figure 1. Public space surrounding the Spanish Library. Personal picture



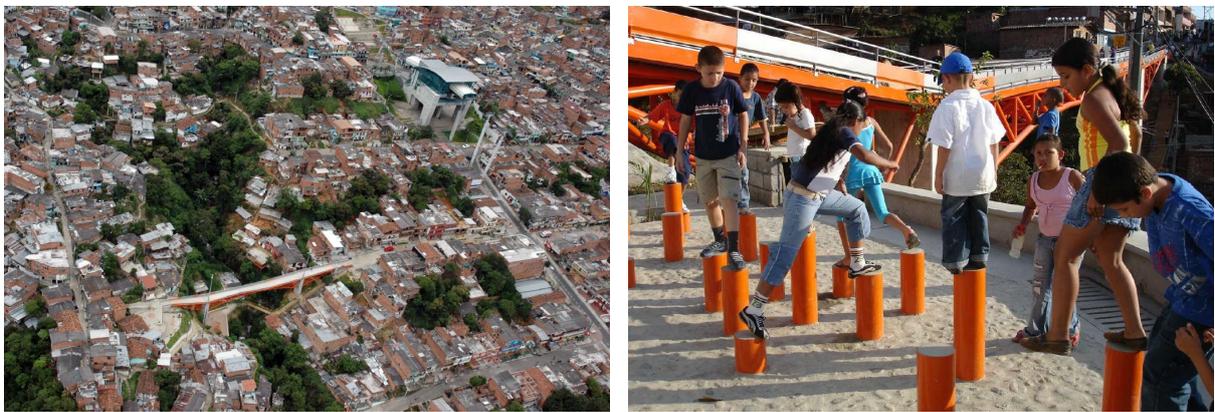
Figure 2. Public open space below the Metrocable station Santo Doming, personal picture.



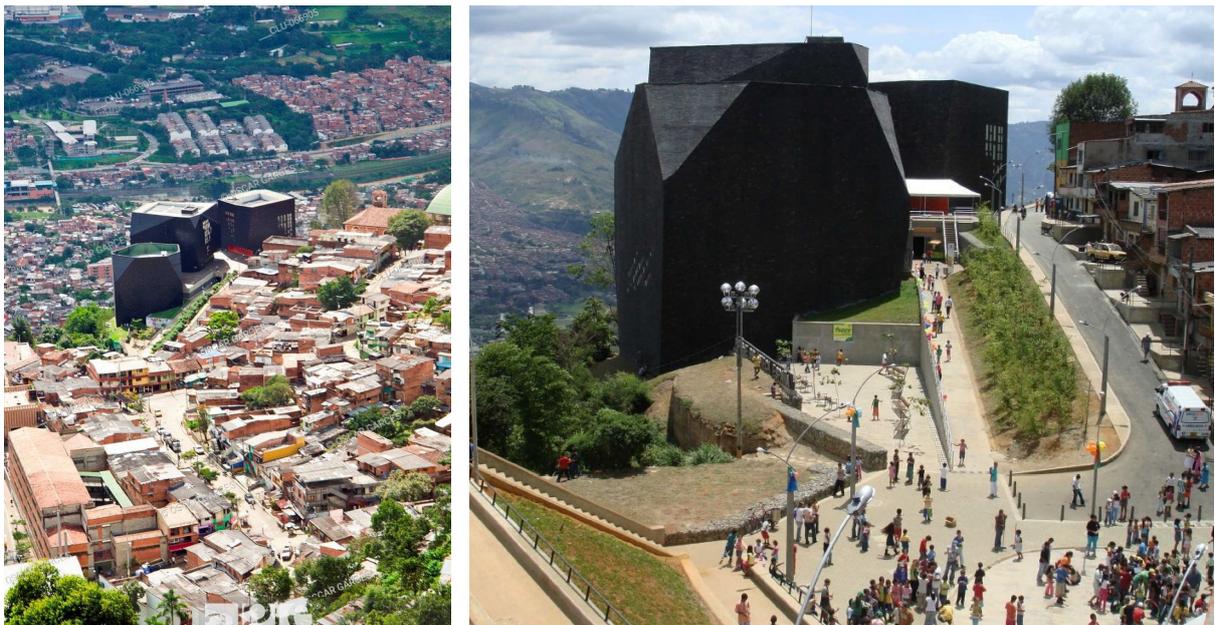
Figures 3 & 4. Sport facilities provided by PUI Nororiental. Personal pictures



Figures 5, 6 & 7. Public space provided by the Urbanismo Social after the Metrocable intervention: before, after and today situation. Source: Rodríguez 2009 and author's picture.



Figures 8 & 9. Puente Mirador, providing accessibility to the stations and public space. Source: Rodríguez 2009



Figures 10 & 11. Spanish Library before closing Source: Agefotostock website & Rodríguez 2009



Figures 12 & 13. Young people performing outside the cultural centre day & night.
Source: BureauMedellin & author's picture.



Figure 14 & 15. Different age groups using the centre. Author's picture.



Figure 16. Aerial photography showing the cultural centre (top part) and Moravia park (bottom right).
Source: Cultural Centre website.



Figure 17. The iconic public escalator of Comuna 13. Source: El Colombiano

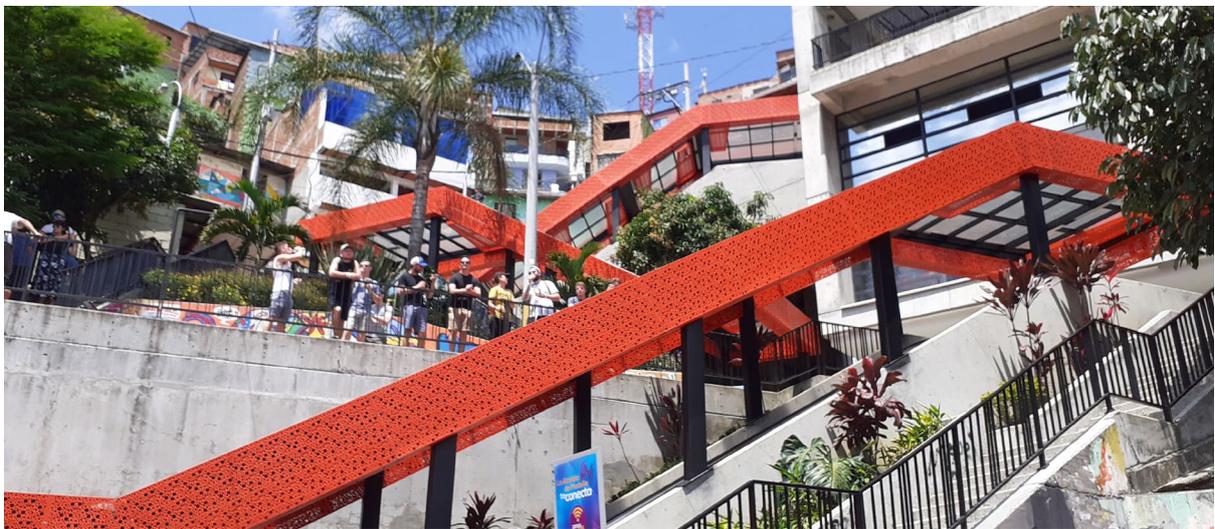


Figure 18. Tourists following the Graffiti Tour on the Escalators. Author's picture.



Figure 19. One of the many graffiti changing the image of the neighbourhood. Author's picture.

led to the temporal closure of the building that is inaccessible since 2015 and its renovation is currently being discussed (Velasquez 2019).

The construction of many other library-parks, some integrated in the PUIs, were integral parts of the programme *Medellín la mas Educada* (Medellín the best educated), the municipal action line promoting cultural and social development not only in the marginalized sectors of the city. Fajardo's administration even introduced the *Olimpiadas de Conocimiento* (Knowledge Olympics), stimulating positive competition among the public schools to increase the quality of the results and the general appeal of education to children; at the end of each year, the public school with the higher scores is awarded during a ceremony and funds provided for small improvements in the school (fig. 21). In the city centre an interacted science and technology museum known as Parque Explora and the Botanical Garden (fig. 22) were opened in 2007 and their transport connections attracts today people from every neighbourhood of the city. New spaces for collective public life were opened and different festival and events hosted between the two facilities. The *Fiesta del libro y la cultura* (Book and Culture Festival) was on purpose created during this revolution and today is an event calling international attention (fig. 23). Additionally, other initiatives were autonomously taken by other bodies, such as the EPM that created a foundation in 2000 (Fundación EPM) providing parks and public space facilities in strategic points of the city.



Figure 20. Parque UVA La Imaginación financed and realized by Fundación EPM. Author's picture.



Figure 21. Olimpiadas de Conocimiento Ceremony. Source: EL Mundo



Figure 22. Parque Explora and Botanical Garden. Picture's author: Jorge Vasquez



Figure 23. Festival del Libro y la Cultura. Source: DC Revista

Conclusions

This chapter has reported that the initiatives promoted by both State and civil society placed the bases for a new relationship between the two, where the first was no longer seen as a tyrannous actor but as a non-repressive one; realizing this change, communities opened some bridging possibilities that facilitated the development of resilience synergies. In entering these environments, State approached certain communitarian organizations or NGOs that in the previous years collected people's attention by offering alternatives (arts or sport) to the overall oppressive atmosphere violent actors were feeding. The initial attempts and approach methodologies of PRIMED found a structured and diffused application during the Urbanismo Social where, for the first time, the municipality prioritized the physical and human development of the people in the mountains.

For violence mitigations two were the major successes: the first was the general provision of alternatives in terms of employment and social/political referee that represented the initial hint reducing the power of armed groups: recruitment of new forces became more difficult with less availability of combatants. Additionally, the different DDR processes took some members out from the violence spiral, even though their rehabilitation was not always successful. The second change was the instauration of public life and people re-appropriation of the public space. If once people was afraid of going out and had to pay attention while moving from one place to the other, locals had finally the possibility of moving and enjoying the barrios without the constant perception of danger. Violent actors were not contested in this way but their sovereignty and general control on social capital reduced. Today *vacunas* are still paid and curfew sometimes established but the general limits of people in living the space not as oppressive as in the past; that is not the case in the whole city, especially where no resilient process has started or where groups are seen as leaders.

Conclusions

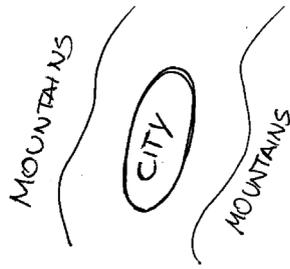
The narration of chronic violence in Medellín opens many reflections about the relationship between people and space.

Since Chapter 1, we have seen that the long-standing Colombian conflict between State and non-State forms of governance prevented the formation of a cohesive civil society that imploded into different *imagined communities* (Davis 2009). Each group controlled important portions of the national territory, fighting for land rights or violently imposing its dominion. The armed conflicts in the countryside forced civilians to seek for security in the major urban agglomerations that were not ready to receive these important amounts of people and most of them refuged in informality. In Medellín the *invasiones* started before mass immigration as the planning of the city and the socio-economic inequalities excluded the vulnerable population that established their new communities in the mountains. Soon, two cities rose: a planned formal centre and an informal periphery. Illegal networks assured livelihood to marginalized inhabitants and when drug entered in circulation with the Cartel, families saw in the industry of violence their redemption. Non-State armed actors achieved the total turf and political control in the mountains, and State lost its sovereignty and authority.

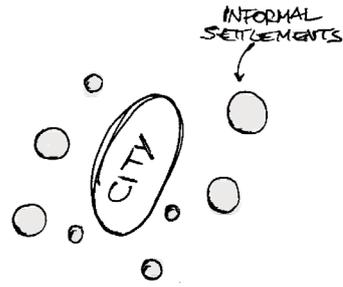
Years of military interventions, fights between groups and deliberate criminality, created a city where fear and seek for security reflects in the different urban forms and in the way people live the city. In the South-West for example, wealthier citizens closed themselves in gated communities where private services and spaces protect their *foam* from the dangers of the outside (Borch 2008). The perceptions of insecurity and consequent needs for protection change in each urban environment where and both physical conditions and the presence of those who guarantee security, either State or non-State groups, increase or decrease the attention to be paid. In informal settlements, where non-State groups are more radicalized, the bound with the host community plays an important role: they can be leaders, cohabitants or oppressors. In formal spaces, State control covers the most important areas even though people also rely on private services, when they can afford them.

All these elements are fundamental to describe the urban atmospheres of Medellín, especially for understanding the relationship people have developed with the threshold space of their *bubble*: the street. Different cycles of violence and changes of law in fact have polluted the air of the neighbourhood foams and public space collected all those emotions, from fear to apparent safety. That unavoidably conditions people's urban experience, even when danger is actually minimized. Eventually, in Medellín no one has ever known what being safe in the public space means: even the safest place in terms of design and control, will always have a layer of fear as people always had to pay attention when walking in the street, and that chronically affected the meanings given to the outer world. If urban environment is the collector of those feelings, it also has an active role in helping the perpetrators of violence (State and non-State) in their operations.

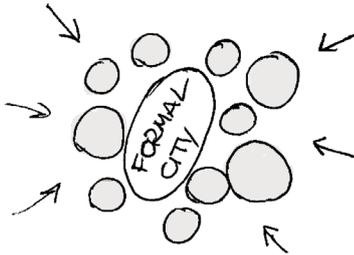
The overall ramification of violence has dramatically dropped in the last decades, in part because of the pacts within the underworld and the complicity with formal forces but also for the contribution of civil society and local administration that activated immunization strategies for the cleansing of



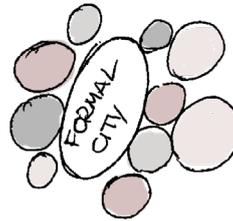
I. ORIGINAL CITY STRUCTURE



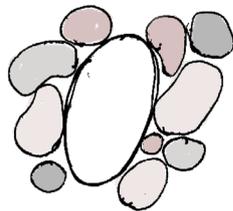
II. INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS RISING BECAUSE OF LAND GRABBING OR UNEMPLOYMENT



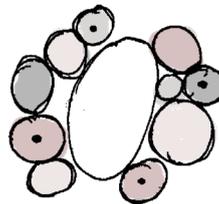
III. INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS GROWING BECAUSE OF REGIONAL VIOLENCE



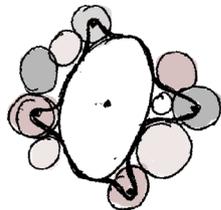
IV. ARMED ACTORS ACHIEVING CONTROL IN THE PERIPHERY



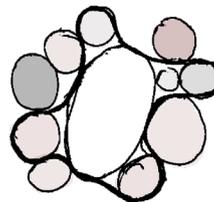
V. GROUPS FIGHTING EACH OTHER AND MOVING ACROSS THE CITY



VI. COMMUNITIES' VITALIST IMPULSE CHANGING THE ATMOSPHERE



VII. STATE RESILIENCE ALLOWING THE CONNECTION WITH MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES



VIII. STATE ESTABLISHING ITS CONTROL ON LOST TERRITORY

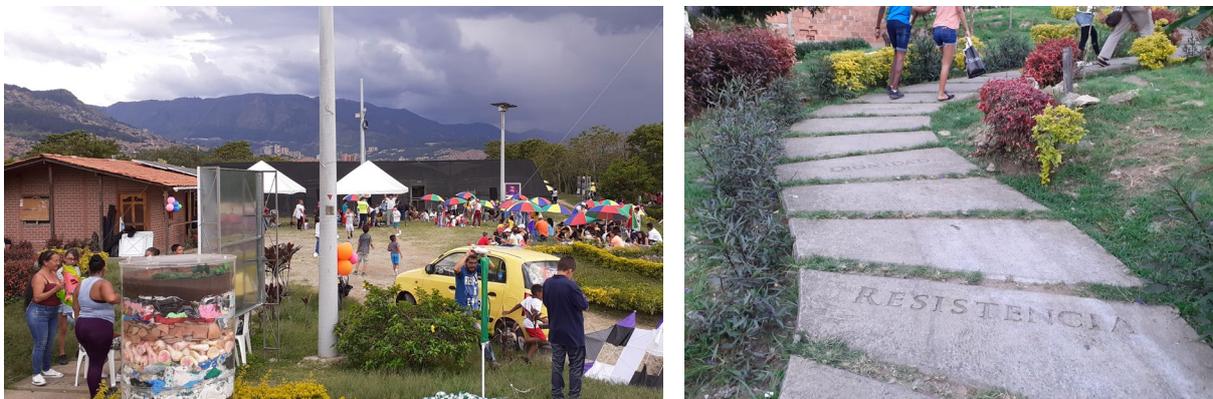
Sketches sequence. Schematic reconstruction of Medellín growth. Author's drawings.

their neighbourhood atmosphere. Communities gathered around arts and sport in order to find alternatives to the industry of violence that still was collecting consensus in their urban territories. State, when recognized people rights for a decent livelihood, was able to establish contacts with its lost population through little interventions and those synergies where the basis for the structured programmes promoted by the Urbanismo Social. From 2004, the following decade signs the real change of Medellín, when the human development of the marginalized population became the priority of the political agenda. New possibilities for citizens of using and move through the city opened up, and public space among all became the resilient tool positively *polluting* the air conditioning system through co-existence and mutual respect.

Physical change has shown, recalling Borch (2008) intuitions on spatial interventions and behavioural modification, that have their role in preserving or modifying the urban atmosphere in its socio-spatial



Figures 1 & 2. Historical reports of the Moravia Dumping Site. Source: Moravia Thematic Park



Figures 3 & 4. Families spending time in the park; design detail. Author's pictures.

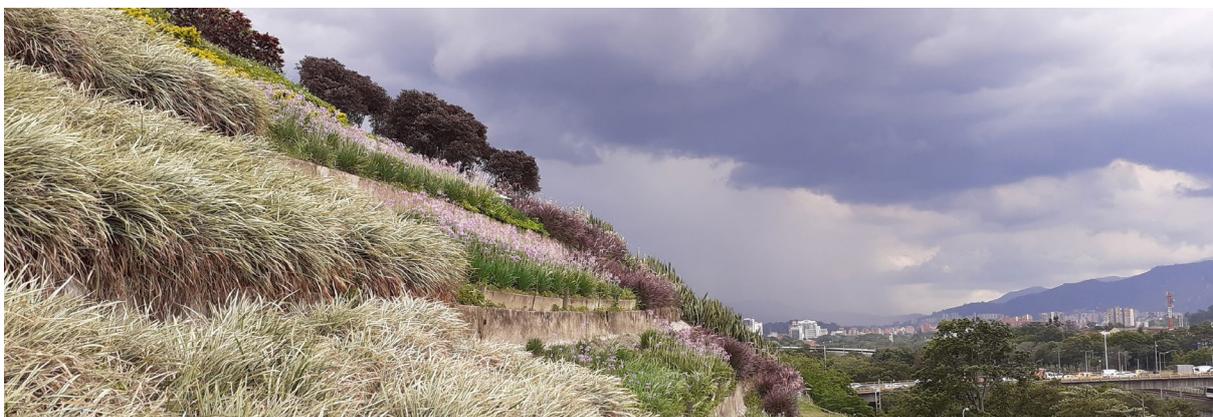


Figure 5. Landscaping detail of one side of the park. Author's picture.

bond and also is an important tool to achieve power. That works for both the parties, when non-State actors reached people’s consensus building houses but also when State interventions helped to change people’s view of authorities, still deeply tied to the history of urbanization: State forces were tearing down structures, arresting community members and burning houses to fight the rising informality. The focus on architecture for social transformation was also important for changing the whole image of neighbourhoods and people’s perception of the identity of their communities. The Spanish Library is a successful example of this change, attracting tourist for many years before its closing and the same happens with the graffiti tour and the escalator in Comuna 13 but also in Moravia, where the former dumping site of the city is today a community park literally showing in its path the strong history of resistance of the neighbourhood (fig. 1 - 5).

In the overall, the greatest success of the spatial modification of the Urbanismo Social was to recognize an integral *right to the city* to the marginalized inhabitants, understood as the “*exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization*” (Harvey 2012). Communities in fact were not just enabled to access the urban resources when interventions were realized, but also empowered in shaping the space according to their needs during the planning process. This was possible through an institutional redesign that considered important for the whole integral development the decentralization of the local administration power and setting a horizontal relationship with its population. During the PRIMED and especially in the elaborations of the PUIs, the shared commitment of all the actors involved, from the inhabitants to the experts, have increased their bridging capital and, creating these new relationships, also promoted the construction of their citizenship (Echeverri & Orsini 2010).

Finally, if planning has contributed in the creation of a new, positive urban narration, its tools might also cause new land conflicts and, apparently, even restore violence. By looking at the POT of 2014 for example (fig. 6), many development projects are foreseen surrounding the river and that represents a worry for the population in the North, especially in Santa Cruz: interviewee 14 wonders, for instance, about what the future of the neighbourhood is going to be now that their land has become desirable

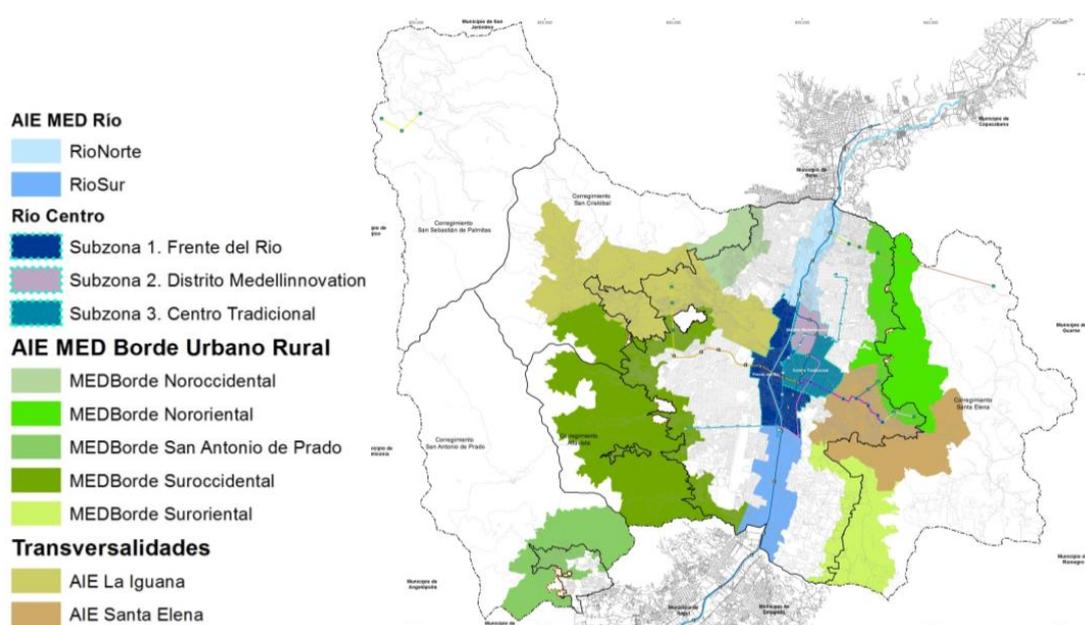


Figure 6. Extract of POT 2014. Source: Municipality website.

to private investors. Apart from the threat of being evicted and eventually reallocated, armed groups also might become a danger in this situation. For example in Moravia, where some demolition have already started, last year few people have vanished (Interview 5), and vanishing is a typical tactic of paramilitaries (their presence in the neighbourhood, in forms of lonely militants, was confirmed by interviews 4, 11, and 14). In the past paramilitaries were killing people in the countryside and taking possession of their lands, eventually returning them to the State for remuneration. Within a corrupted system and with political representatives connected to armed groups, can we exclude that similar dynamics are still happening today in the city? Many rumours confirmed this circumstance but no official sources was available to realize a cross-check.

Learning outcomes

The whole research in Medellín was an important eye-opening experience for my personal growth. Before this work, I could not imagine that violence in Colombia was that radicalized in the political history of the country, whose effects are still real today when stories of occupied territories, violence and political corruption are on everyone's lips. The initial broaden perspective of the bibliographical work helped me to receive a glimpse of these aspects but I could realize how much impacts those narrations had just on site. In Medellín I could test if those ideas and impressions I developed were addressed in the right way but also I had to discuss others; for sure I took consciousness of the intensity of the topic. I am convinced that the only way to really understand a place is living it and mingle with locals and that is actually the reason that pushed me to go to Medellín. Going out, talking to people with a different mind-set and having Colombian housemates, I was continuously receiving and processing many information. After a while, I reflected on other dynamics I had not considered with a not-local point of view and I decided to follow this flow, diverting a little my work that initially was meant to focus exclusively on urban interventions as resilience mechanisms.

In general, what I have learnt as planner, is that planning itself is, unfortunately, conditioned by political will. If all the steps that led to the Urbanismo Social would not have seen strong commitments by the mayors in charge, giving new hopes to the city could have not been possible. However, the approach of the different development plans tried to institute different democratic practices, at least in giving people the opportunity to be listened and ave their say on the space they wanted. With my experiences in informal settlements, I guess engaging people in the process must have been the hardest part, especially if you are a technician working for the State. A planner him/her-self in this context must be smart in understanding the right approach to enter some realities and giving it time to see some initial interests and participation. People are particularly vulnerable for the history of exclusion and violence they have gone through and trusting someone outside their community/world becomes a challenge. Planner/planning in this case also becomes the bridging element between State and communities.

As a European abroad, I realized again how much our influence (together with the US) destroyed an ancient nature-based culture with its social and political structures, still today present somewhere in the countryside, especially in the Amazon. Fortunately the Colombian government has recognized the belonging territories to the indigenous communities that keep preserving the natural realm and its biodiversity.

As Lorenzo, I have found myself living in an environment so different from the one I am from, and that made me appreciate on one side what I had back home but, on the other, it also left me so much curiosity in exploring a culture so rich and so diverse. People's mind-set and life-style is generally more relaxed compared to the social rules and pressure typical of Italy/Europe. I admit that during the first two months after my arrival I was more than convinced not to come back.

As a human being, I had once again the confirmation that the world can be scary and there is so much evil all around, but there are good things happening too and I saw that in the strength of the communities I have visited. Despite everything that has happened and is still going on, people still smile and is thankful to life for what they have. I will never forget the words of a man in Nueva Jerusalén living with his wife and two children in a 12 square meters precarious house: *"as long as you have health, you have everything"*.

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