Medellín: A City Reborn?

by
Holli Drummond, John Dizgun, and David J. Keeling
Photographs by the authors

Contextualizing Medellín

Cities all around the world experience physical and cultural transformations over space and through time. Sometimes these changes are subtle, slow, and unspectacular. At other times, the pace of urban change can be quite rapid, dramatic, and newsworthy. Think of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Sarajevo during the Balkan conflict, or Dubai over the last decade, and the broader context of urban transformation comes more sharply into focus. Observing changes in a city's infrastructure, such as buildings, transportation, or green space, for example, can lead to important questions about planning, policy, and growth strategies. These shifts can be reasonably easy to examine through maps, landscape surveys, photography, and other methodologies. In contrast, teasing out changes in a city's culture or identity can prove a little more challenging, especially when conditions are not ideal for analysis and interpretation. Understanding urban change in Pyongyang (North Korea), Yangon (Myanmar), Mogadishu (Somalia), or Grozny (Chechnya, Russia), for instance, can be fraught with practical and political difficulties. Violent crime, war, political conflict, terrorism, and street gangs can all shape how outsiders perceive a specific city and how the denizens of that city see themselves (see Covey 2010).

Few cities in the world have experienced the level of violence and brutality that characterized Medellín, Colombia, during the 1980s and 1990s. The escapades of Pablo Escobar, Colombia's preeminent drug lord until his death in 1993, Hollywood movie depictions such as *Clear and Present Danger* (Clancy 1989), and sensational news exposés of drug- and guerilla-related murders in the city, have shaped many people's perception of Medellín as one of the world's most dangerous urban environments (Borrell 1988). In the early

1990s, Medellín recorded about 6,500 murders annually, with city police afraid to enter certain areas of the city controlled by street gangs, guerilla groups, and drug cartels. In the city's poorest neighborhoods, like Comuna 13 sprawling up the Andean slopes on Medellín's southwest side, daily life became a struggle for security and survival. It seemed for a time that the local and national governments had abandoned neighborhoods like Comuna 13 to the gangs and cartels, causing serious disruption in the urban socio-economic fabric and stunting any likelihood of positive development.

As part of the American Geographical Society's Bowman Expedition program, which is designed to focus attention on the spatial context of change in communities, our team visited Medellín, Colombia, to study Comuna 13 and its constituent barrios (Figure 1). The project's goal is to understand how the residents of Comuna 13, especially young people, have adapted to changing socio-economic conditions since the government reasserted control over the neighborhood in 2002 after Operation Orión. Of particular interest are questions of security, economic development, perceptions of the community, and accessibility and mobility in the Comuna. In this illustrated essay, we present a brief history of the city, discuss infrastructural improvements critical to the continued incorporation of the Comuna's residents into networks of employment, education, and opportunity, and analyze social change from the perspective of young adults. Our goal is to shed light on both the symbolic and practical impacts of infrastructural improvements, and on general perceptions of change in Comuna 13.

From Oasis to Orión

Founded in 1616 by Spanish *conquistadores* in the fertile valley of Aburrá (named

Figure 1. *Medellín, Colombia, highlighting the Metro system and Comuna 13.*

for one of the indigenous groups that had lived in the region for over a thousand years), Medellín grew in stature in the nineteenth century thanks to the production of gold and, more importantly, coffee. In 1875— at a time when the development of railroads was gradually becoming the symbol of modernization and progress in much of Latin America— the recently-formed *Ferrocarril de Antioquia* or Antioquia Railway completed La Quiebra Tunnel, a colossal engineering feat that connected the Andean city to the Magdalena River, Colombia's central artery to the Caribbean Sea and, by extension, the industrial powers of the North Atlantic.

That geographic breakthrough coincided with the regional discovery of coal and the construction of hydroelectric plants, providing Medellín with the energy and transport infrastructure to fuel its industrial growth. As coffee exports

Figure 2. Panorama of the southern Aburrá Valley, Medellín.

Figure 3. *Botero sculpture in the downtown plaza of Medellín.*

increased, the textile industry— led by the creation of the Coltejer Company in 1907 —signaled Medellín's rise as a center of commercial and entrepreneurial activity. Major food, beverage, and glass companies soon followed and Medellín's first airport was built in 1932. From 1905 to 1951, the population of the city grew from just under 60,000 to nearly 360,000. In short, Medellín emerged as Colombia's leading industrial center in the first-half of the twentieth century (Restrepo 1981; Melo 1996; Ramírez Patiño 2011) (Figure 2).

This momentum led local government officials, industrialists, entrepreneurs, and cultural leaders to sponsor in the 1950s what in English has been dubbed the Medellín Master Plan (MMP). This urban initiative called for the expansion of the city, the creation of an industrial zone, the canalization of the Medellín River (which runs south-north through the city), the beautification of the riverbanks and other parts of the city, and the construction of both a soccer stadium and *La Alpujarra* administrative center (Restrepo 1981). Two new universities— the University of Medellín (1950) and EAFIT University (1960)— were founded, joining the renowned University of Antioquia (1803) to enhance Medellín's reputation as an intellectual center. The 1950s also saw the emergence in Medellín of a new generation of artists and writers, including Gonzalo Arango and Fernando Botero, the latter gaining international notoriety for his portly, satirical sculptures of both privileged and common citizens (Figure 3).

The MMP of the 1950s and Medellín's earlier accomplishments in the first-half of the century masked other, less desirable realities. While undoubtedly a leader in terms of modernization, since the early 1900s Medellín also led the nation in levels of prostitution, alcoholism, and imprisonment rates. These undesirable characteristics were something local elites and the Catholic Church continually sought to overcome by publicly promoting their more conservative views of morality and

the *antioqueño* "work-ethic" ethos. The *antioqueño is* a core tenet of the city's collective identity to this day (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001). Moreover, like many Latin American cities, the gap between the rich and poor in Medellín remained palpable. In the 1950s, the MMP aimed to regulate the growing settlements of rural migrants that had developed in recent years on the city's steep slopes (Restrepo 1981) (Figure 4). MMP leaders struggled to deal with these squatter neighborhoods, often unable (and sometimes unwilling) to provide them with

Figure 4. *Makeshift accommodations in the upper reaches of Comuna 13.*

basic services such as sewage, water, schools, roads, and health care.

However much a challenge in the 1950s, rural-to-urban migration in Medellín (and throughout Colombia) mushroomed in the 1960s and 1970s. In the decades following the 1948 assassination of widely-regarded populist presidential candidate Jorge Gaitán by conservative political forces, Colombia witnessed an unimaginable spike in violence that would last for decades. At first, it pitted factions of liberal and conservative elites against one another; that struggle came to an end in 1958 in the form of a power-sharing agreement called the National Front. However, for armed (communist and left-leaning) peasant groups, who throughout the 1950s had been the target of heavy-handed government-sponsored military offensives, the National Front did little to squelch their demands for broad agrarian reform and greater political representation. When in the post-1958 period landowning elites (both liberal and conservative) launched military attacks against armed peasants in an effort to reclaim landholdings occupied by peasants between 1948 and 1958, civil war ensued. By the mid-1960s, armed peasant groups banded together to form leftist revolutionary guerrilla groups such as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army), among others. Differences among the various guerrilla groups aside,

they all battled the Colombian state in bloody fashion, predominantly in the countryside, for decades to come (Bailey 1967; Bushnell 1993; Melo 1996; Safford and Palacios 2001; Palacios 2006).

As violence spread in rural areas in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, hundreds of thousands of poor Colombian farmers and their families fled the countryside for the cities. Since the conflict began in the 1950s, approximately 5 million Colombians have been displaced, putting Colombia second only to Sudan for the country with the highest total of displaced persons in the world. In Medellín alone, the population swelled from 358,000 in 1951 to 1,071,000 by 1973. Not surprisingly, most settled in the rapidly expanding slums built on Medellín's mountainsides in the northern and western parts of the city—Comuna 13 serving as a prime example (Figure 5). The Medellín Master Plan could not handle, let alone project such a demographic increase. Worse, the economic and modernizing gains of the first-half of the century stalled as Colombia's civil war escalated. In Medellín, prominent industries downsized, new initiatives stalled, and already high unemployment skyrocketed. Politically, local parties were unequipped to represent (or even comprehend) the interests of this growing mass of urban poor and, not surprisingly, the challenge of providing basic utilities to these indigent mountainside neighborhoods remained daunting. Ever more, Medellín

developed into a city of haves and have-nots, segregated by social class and geographic boundaries (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001; Álvarez Echeverri 2003).

Although rural-to-urban migration slowed in the 1980s, industrial output in Medellín (and Colombia as a whole) remained weak and unemployment high. Making matters worse, the economic slow-down facilitated the dramatic rise of the Medellín drug cartel. Led by modern-day *caudillo* Pablo Escobar, the cartel developed a multi-billion dollar, export-oriented drug trade that forever transformed Medellín, Colombia, Latin America, and the United States. In Medellín, where civil institutions and the rule of law had already been weakened over the previous two decades, the cocaine trade signaled the rapid rise of Mafia praxes, gang activity, urban crime, vigilante justice, and violent homicides. On the national level, the Medellín cartel sponsored a number of terrorist attacks against the Colombian state aimed in large part at blocking the government from signing an extradition treaty with the United States. The cartel's bloody offensive in the 1980s—the assassination of high-ranking politicians and journalists, bombings of government facilities and shopping malls, and the blowing up an Avianca jetliner over Bogotá in 1989 (killing all 107 passengers aboard)—led to a sharp escalation in armed violence throughout Colombia. Not only did it contribute to a government counter-offensive (with monetary and military assistance from the United States), but it also emboldened guerrilla groups such as FARC and ELN to sponsor a new wave of attacks on the Colombian army in the nation's southern provinces (or, in the case of the M-19 guerrilla group, to raid the Colombian Supreme Court in 1985 and kill 11 Justices in the process). This in turn gave rise to violent paramilitary and self-defense groups who practiced their own brand of vigilante justice, at times with the tacit approval of the Colombian military (Bushnell 1993; Bowden 2002; Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001; Safford and Palacios 2001; Palacios 2006; Ramírez 2008). Of all Colombian cities, Medellín experienced the most acute violence and bloodshed. Between 1990 and 2002, there were 55,365 recorded homicides in Medellín, the overwhelming majority involving poor individuals in the city's slums (Cardona et al. 2005). During that thirteen-year span, the peak year for recorded homicides was 6,658 in 1991 compared to a "low" of 2,854 in 1998.

Figure 5. Urban expansion along the Andes ridges that overlook Medellín.

The death of Pablo Escobar at the hands of Colombian and U.S. special forces in December, 1993, fueled hopes for the demise of the cartel and a decrease in violence. On a positive note, the 1994 and 1995 homicide rates in Medellín dropped modestly (Ramírez 2008). Ultimately, however, Escobar's death underscored a callous reality: many of Medellín's gangs "were not simple mercenaries working for the drug kingpins" (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw, 2001:130). For the urban poor, drug trafficking increasingly had become a cultural avenue of upward mobility, leading to a proliferation of gangs and militia groups and, by extension, criminal activity in the post-Escobar era.

Following a relatively significant drop in the homicide rate in 1998, there was a disturbing uptick over the ensuing three years. City officials and residents grew particularly concerned as the violence began to spread beyond the poorest sectors of the poorest neighborhoods. On the national scene, following the ineffective presidency of Ernesto Samper (1994–1998), newly-elected conservative Colombian President Andres Pastrana (1998–2002) *expressed* renewed determination to combat the drug trade, (leftist) guerrillas, and even (rightist) paramilitaries; his loyalty to the U.S. cause won him significant new sources of Congressional funding. Pastrana's more assertive tone, which his successor Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) more successfully put into action, coincided with growing public cries for peace and stability. Working in close cooperation with the Colombian military and national intelligence services, Medellín's local government and security forces took political and tactical advantage of these developments to launch two highly-coordinated police-military-intelligence operations in Comuna 13 and other violence- and poverty-stricken mountainside neighborhoods. The first, dubbed *Operación Mariscal* (May 2002), was not particularly successful. In contrast, during *Operación Orión* (October 2002) police and military units, for the first time in decades, successfully managed to gain and, more importantly, maintain a physical presence in Comuna 13 (Demarest 2011). So much so that, by 2003, the homicide rate had dropped to 600 and would remain at or near that level for much of the remainder of decade. With some measure of normalcy returning to Comuna 13 in the mid-2000s, city government and local community leaders began to think more about the development

challenges facing the neighborhood within the broader context of urban change (Figure 6).

Changing Accessibility and Mobility in Comuna 13

Across the planet, millions of urbanites still live in conditions of economic, social, and political deprivation that limit their access to growth and opportunity. In Latin American cities particularly, accessibility and mobility in many of the poorest neighborhoods have been negatively impacted further by gangs, guerilla organizations, and a lack of local government action (Zibechi 2008). In Medellín, some of the poorest sectors of the city have long had a reputation for violence, drug activity, and battles over control of barrios, as outlined in the previous section. Waves of urban expansion across the city, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, exacerbated these socio-economic challenges in the hillside barrios, with populist city leaders ignoring the accessibility and mobility challenges created by tens of thousands of squatters. These new urbanites were influenced by a need to be closer to urban services and jobs, and by low property prices and informal land ownership opportunities. The barrios of Comuna 13 proved attractive to these migrants, despite the lack of basic services, a lack of security, and violent conditions up and down the hillsides (Figure 7).

Sprawling up the northeastern and southwestern hills that parallel the Aburrá Valley of Medellín, makeshift dwellings,

along with more substantial structures, cover the steep, sloping terrain in a dense pattern that makes traditional road access difficult (Figure 8). Although accessibility and mobility in the urban environment had received varying degrees of planning attention from the national and city governments since the 1940s, no real effort to consider modernizing mobility in Medellín occurred until the early to mid-1980s (Figure 9). Planning for a mass-transit rail
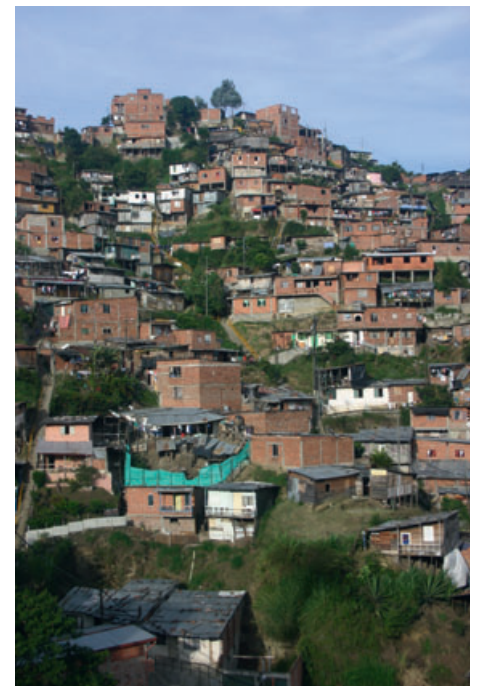

Figure 7. Looking westward up the hillside from the Metrocable Station at San Javier, Comuna 13.

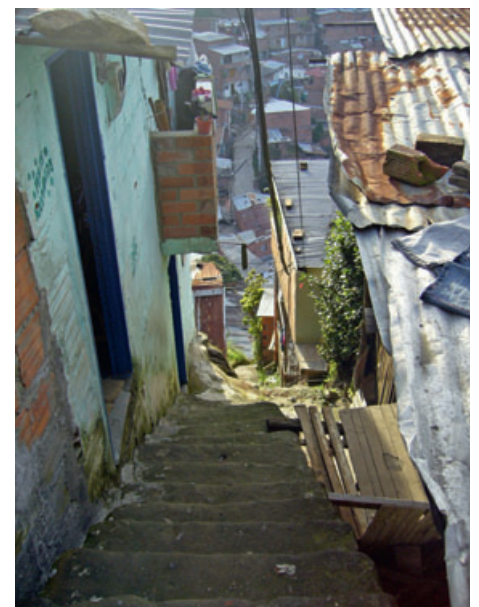*Figure 6. Turning guns in to music – in the local museum.*

Figure 8. Typical hillside pathway between residences on the hillsides of Comuna 13.

system for the valley began in the early 1980s, with construction underway by 1985, despite arguments that insufficient economic demand existed to make the Metro profitable. The goal of the system was to move workers more efficiently from the low-income barrios north of the downtown core to a cluster of factories concentrated in Medellín's southern districts (Figure 10). Financial problems interrupted construction of the Metro, with the first line not inaugurated until 1995. Moreover, continued violence and unrest in the hillside barrios east and west of the valley stymied any thoughts of improving accessibility and mobility in neighborhoods like Comuna 13.

Although not without controversy, *Operación Orión* paved the way for a bold and ambitious local development plan spearheaded by Medellín Mayors Luís Pérez (2001–2003) and, particularly, Sergio Fajardo (2004–2007). At once, the Medellín Model has sought to deal with past urban trauma and fuel future economic and cultural growth. City officials, in cooperation with the national government, sponsored direct negotiations with Medellín's various gangs, militias, guerrillas, and paramilitary groups, including relatively successful demobilization and re-integration efforts. Counselors, psychologists, NGOs, and community youth groups such as *Sal y Luz* have been tapped (and funded) to help residents overcome years of trauma. Police

have worked in close cooperation with community members to maintain and improve neighborhood security. The municipal government has dedicated over 30% of its budget to education, building new schools, libraries, parks, and recreational spaces in Comuna 13 and other poor neighborhoods. It also has invested heavily in the city's transportation infrastructure, notably the construction of two separate MetroCable (ski-lift style) lines and, more recently, an "escalator" that for the first time have connected isolated mountainside boroughs directly to the city's subway network and, by extension, the city center (Figure 11). The government and the private sector have established cash grant and microloan programs to support business development by the poor while also seeking direct foreign investment to foster industrial growth, job creation, and economic renewal. To pay for many of these publicly-funded projects, the city channels 30% of the annual profits of the well-managed, quasi-private main energy company (*Empresas Públicas de Medellín* or EPM) into its administrative budget (Bateman *et al.* 2011).

When the idea of a cable-car system to improve access to and from these areas was presented to the city's mayoral candidates in 2000, it did not receive enthusiastic support. However, Luís Pérez, the successful candidate (2001–2003), endorsed the project, and the first line (K) came into service in 2004 during the administration of Sergio Fajardo (2004–2007). Metrocable Line K serves the barrios of Comuna 1 and 2, which have a combined population of around 250,000, with stations at Acevedo, Andalucia, Popular, and Santo Domingo.

Figure 9. La Alpujarra Administrative Center constructed in the 1980s in downtown Medellín.

Figure 10. The Medellín heavy-rail metro system.

Figure 11. Metrocable gondolas at the interchange station at San Javier.

Figure 12. Advertising Medellín culture through the Metrocable gondolas.

Figure 13. Informal street vendors in Comuna 13 often carry their wares on public transport.

Line J, which serves approximately 300,000 people in Comuna 7 and 13, opened to the public in April 2008 with stations at San Javier (metro interchange), Juan XXIII, Vallejuelos, and La Aurora. It covers a length of 2.8 kilometers, ascends vertically about 300 meters overall, and has a capacity of 3,000 passengers per hour using 119 serviceable cabins each holding 10 passengers (Figure 12).

After traveling on the Metrocable system during our research in Comuna 13, it became apparent that it has had positive impacts, but significant limitations exist in terms of improving overall accessibility and mobility. Improved passenger comfort and security, shortened journey times to the urban core, combined transport tariffs (bus+Metro+cablecar), and the psychological impact of the infrastructure are all worthy of praise. However, the Metrocable has technical limitations that restrict loads to about 3,000 passengers an hour, which reduce its functionality as a mass-transit system. In addition, the spatial dynamics of the barrios that comprise Comuna 13 require long walks to the nearest station for many passengers, with wait times to board during peak periods often 30 minutes or more. Bulky personal effects are not allowed on the Metro system, unlike buses, which make it a less attractive mode of transportation for some, especially those who sell on the street in the informal economy (Figure 13). At the citywide scale, there is insufficient multimodality planning to take account of travel patterns that require access to the furthest reaches of the metropolitan region. For many Comuna 13 residents, walking down the hillsides to take conventional buses to

Figure 14. Sal y Luz community offices in Comuna 13.

their destinations appears to remain a more practical and time-effective means of accessibility and mobility to desired services and employment.

Youth, Perception, and Security in Comuna 13

As part of the Bowman Expedition to Medellín, in June, 2009, our team conducted a survey of approximately 1,500 youth enrolled in three of six secondary schools in Comuna 13 (representing 60% of all students in these schools). The 130-question survey of adolescents and preadolescents (participants ranged in age from 9 to 19) focused on concerns about safety, the prevalence of risky behaviors, accessibility and mobility, social and political integration, and attitudes about the present and future direction of Comuna 13 and Medellín. The success of our survey project, in no small measure, relied upon the support *Sal y Luz* provided (Figure 14). This community organization, serving the needs of neighborhood youth, helped us both select schools that would capture the diversity of youth experience in Comuna 13 and locate native speakers to read aloud the survey questions, allowing for

Figure 15. Poster in the Comuna promoting civic engagement.

quality information to be obtained in an efficient manner.

Survey results are mixed. On the one hand, they illustrate that Medellín's new civic culture has served as a rallying point for community pride and the belief that Comuna 13 and Medellín as a whole are improving (Figure 15). At the same time, the evidence suggests that complications persist. For instance, a slight majority of students (51%) reported never feeling unsafe at school compared to 8% who feel unsafe most or all of the time. Similarly, 41% never feel unsafe getting to school compared to 10% who feel unsafe most or all of the time. In contrast, only 18% of students never feel unsafe in their residential neighborhood compared to 25% who feel unsafe most or all of the time. In short, survey results suggest that most students have little or no concern about safety when at school, yet live with a heightened sense of potential danger in and around home (Figure 16). On a positive note, students reported that Comuna residents enjoy access to basic goods and services. Ninety-seven percent contend that their residence has electricity, 88% have running water and an indoor toilet, 87% a phone, and 86% basic cable. A large percentage also makes use of local parks (73%), a neighborhood or school library (69%), or reports having "easy access" to the Internet (77%) in their community (Figure 17). Fifty-eight percent agree that they had access to affordable shopping.

If access to basic utilities, parks, and libraries appears widespread, there is cause for concern with respect to community health care and, particularly, banking. While 56% of students feel that a medical clinic is conveniently located within their neighborhood, a more modest 48% have visited the doctor at least once in the last two years. Possible consequences include not only a potential lack of basic health maintenance and preventive care, but also lost opportunities to develop relationships with knowledgeable, often influential professionals. Of greater concern is that only 16% of students reported the presence of a bank in their neighborhood. Of course, students and their families can make use of financial institutions in other parts of

Medellín, but the absence of banks in the Comuna suggests, first, that local families are less likely to establish relationships with these core social-economic entities and, second, private investment in the community is lacking and with it access to capital for local residents and (potential) small business owners. The prospects of local economic development invariably suffer.

The survey also raised some concerns about city governance and police protection (Figure 18). While 71% of students are aware of concerned community groups (i.e. such as *Sal y Luz*) in their neighborhood, less than half (41%) feel that local political officials represent their concerns or those of their family. Roughly the same percentage (40%) agrees that the police do a "good job" in making them feel safe in their community. Such responses take on added meaning when we consider student attitudes towards gangs, gang affiliation, and the use of violence (Figure 19). On a relatively positive note, only 15% of those surveyed report ever being a member of a gang and 22% admit to hanging out with gang members. On the other hand, 48% of respondents agree that kids who are members of a gang continue to get respect in the Comuna, while 53% answer "many" when asked "Are there any gang problems in your neighborhood?" Most alarming is not that 35% of students admit to being involved in a physical fight (i.e. pushing, hitting, kicking, or worse) within the last month, but that: a) 54% agree that it is not possible to avoid fights in their neighborhood, b) 47% of those involved in a fight responded that they would "finish it," and

Figure 16. Neighborhood schools provide a safe environment in the Comuna.

Figure 17. New parks and open spaces have helped to create positive views of the Comuna.

Figure 18. Poster in the Comuna promoting the importance of safety and security.

c) an alarming 66% concur that, when in a dispute, you should "stand your ground to get what you want no matter the cost." While Anderson (1999) and others (see Drummond *et al*. 2010 for a review) have illustrated that this "Code of the Streets" is not unique to Medellín, the belief among a large segment of survey respondents about the appropriateness of resolving conflict through physical violence is nonetheless troubling. If for some it comes as a surprise that 65% of surveyed students believe "Medellín is moving in a positive direction," fewer are startled to learn that 68% acknowledge that they would like to move out of the Comuna.

A City Reborn? Medellín for the Next Generation

Emerging from our initial research on the rebirth of Comuna 13 over the past decade is a clearer understanding of several key issues. First, in terms of the value of the Metrocable system to Comuna 13, there is little doubt that this highly visible piece of transport infrastructure plays an important symbolic and aesthetic role in fostering a sense of inclusion into the urban mainstream (Figure 20). Nonetheless, any new infrastructure such as transportation, schools, services, or businesses in the Comuna must be planned with sensitivity to geographic and social integration processes. More recent research on the Metrocable's impacts argues that significant doubt remains concerning the overall mobility benefits of the system, and that

Figure 19. Community police station.

Figure 20. Metrocable station entrance at La Aurora.

stimulus to the local economy, land, and housing markets has been limited to those people living in the immediate zones of the stations (Brand and Dávila 2011). Without a significant investment in the material wellbeing of Comuna 13 residents in order to reduce poverty and social inequity and enhance participation in the

local political process, the Metrocable will remain primarily symbolic.

Second, despite better times in Medellín generally and Comuna 13 specifically, various media reports over the past two years have pointed to an alarming increase in murder rates across the region, especially among young men aged 18–25

(in Medellín in 2009, homicides numbered nearly 2,900). Some attribute the rise to the 2008 extradition of paramilitary druglord Diego Fernando Murilo (a.k.a. Don Berna) to the United States, which, reminiscent of the period following Escobar's death in 1993, has led to an increase in fighting among midsize local gangs eager to fill power vacuum. If student responses in the 2009 youth survey are any indication, much work remains to be done by the government to improve security and the overall quality of life in the city and Comuna.

Finally, social and transport infrastructure like the Metrocable are a necessary, but not sufficient, component of social improvement. The potential impacts of improved accessibility and mobility for neighborhoods like Comuna 13, along with the impacts of improved social services and enhanced security, depend on a complex set of conditions that are shaped in part by local, regional, national, and global processes. For example, perceptions of opportunity, safety, mobility, and quality of life by young people in the Comuna are influenced by myriad political and socio-economic conditions that must be considered in any neighborhood development strategies. Medellín has certainly stepped back from the abyss of social collapse that it faced during the 1980s and 1990s, but many of the underlying conditions that shaped those decades still exist today. Although life for many in Comuna 13 has improved measurably since *Operación Orion*, our preliminary analysis suggests that much remains to be done by local and city authorities if future generations of residents are to fulfill the promise of development offered by the policies and events of the past decade. The enduring challenge for Medellín is to capitalize on these improvements and harness all of the city's human and material potential to become of paragon of urban change.

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